風波しのぎ

Kazanami Shinogi

THE NEW GATE

ザ・ニュー・ゲート

05.紅の殲滅者

ALPHAPOLIS
アルファポリス

THE NEW GATE VOLUME 5

Crimson Exterminator

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Nell Stewart

Chapter 1

“I saw it!”

It was the third day since Shin and the second princess of Bayreuth Kingdom, Rionne, had been transposed to the Sacred Place Kalkia. The rampart of the stronghold city, Balmel, was visible to the two people who continued going south.

Normally it was impossible to arrive in three days, but they were upper class Chosen Ones. It could be said that their speed surpassed that of a flying dragon.

Similarly from the Sacred Place to Balmel, there was quite a distance from the large crowd of monsters. Since the Goblins and other monsters were the main constituent for their slow movements, they still had probably nearly a week to spare.

“I’ll go meet the feudal lord. Shin, please report to the Adventurer’s Guild.”

“Understood. What will you do afterwards?”

“When it comes to the intercepting the large-scale of ‘Flood’ monsters’ invasion, cooperation of the guild and the army is essential. It means that the Chosen Ones will assemble immediately.”

“I see. Roger that.”

The current time was just past noon. Since it was not early in the morning or late at night, he didn’t have to wait at the reception desk.

Rionne told the circumstances to the guard who was in the guardroom of the gate, and was guided to the feudal lord’s castle.

Shin also asked the guard about the place and headed toward the Adventurer’s Guild.

“Is it in between Bayreuth and Falnido?”

What Shin spoke about was the race of people he came across. There were a lot more beasts here than in Bayreuth, and more humans than in Falnido. He also saw some elves and dragnils.

The key point of defending was to keep the overflowing monsters in check from the Sacred Place. In addition, because the city was next to the sea and an abundance of mountains, this might have resulted in various races gathering.

“It’s lively.”

Shin briskly walked for a while, and soon saw a familiar signboard.

He opened the door, entered inside, and made his way to the counter.

“Excuse me, could you relay something to the guild master?”

“Sorry for being so for asking, but what kind of business do you have with Guild Master?”

The elf receptionist girl, who gave off the impression of a working woman with glasses on, asked him with a dubious look.

It was the first time Shin had come to Balmel, so he didn’t know any acquaintances. When an adventurer without acquaintances asked to call the guild master, you probably would think it was suspicious, too.

“There is information on the ‘Flood’. In addition to the Guild Card, I also pledge with my social position.”

“...Please wait a moment.”

The receptionist contemplated for a moment before lightly bowing and drawing back to an inside room.

It was likely that she couldn’t ignore it when she heard it was about the ‘Flood’.

“This way, please.”

The receptionist, who returned after a few minutes, prompted Shin to the back room.

It seemed that the guild interior's design was almost the same in every town. They walked a short distance and a big door could be seen, and the reception girl knocked on it.

"It's Eliza. I brought you the adventurer in question."

"It's open. Have him enter."

The reply, which came from the other side of the door, was a male voice.

Also, this reception girl seemed to be called Eliza.

Shin passed through the door which had been opened by Eliza, and entered the room.

"Welcome to the Adventurer's Guild. I am the guild master, Baren Lakt. I'm told that you brought information on the 'Flood'; could you tell me more about it?"

When he was invited to sit on the sofa, Shin felt that he was being observed.

Baren's appearance was that of a man just past his 60's. Most of his hair was white; wrinkles also stood out on his face.

However, even if he looked gentle, that glint in eyes held a sharpness that wasn't inferior to Barlux's.

"I am Shin. The 'Flood' occurred around Sacred Place Kalkia. It consists mainly of Goblins, Orcs and others humanoid monsters. Judging from the speed of their progression, I think it will take them about one week until they arrive here."

"…Your expression looks like you've seen it happen; may I ask for your information sources?"

"As you said, I saw it. I can't say in detail, but I can confirm that a mass of monsters was heading toward Balmel when I went to the vicinity of the Sacred Place. My companion has already gone to contact the feudal lord here."

“To the feudal lord? Does the person accompanying you have a high social rank?”

Baren asked, and narrowed his eyes slightly.

If one could have an audience with the feudal lord immediately, it must be a person with a high position to some degree. As expected from the guild master of the city near the Sacred Place, he was quick to catch on.

“You will know about my companion’s status. The information should be passed on to you soon. Leaving that aside, do you believe in my information?”

“Hrm, I can not remain silent when hearing ‘Flood’. But under the present situation, there’s no proof to back up what you’re saying——”

Baren said, while putting his hand on his chin.

However, it seemed he already sent a messenger to confirm the information contrary to his words.

There were people leaving the guild hurriedly; Shin could sense it.

“If you say that you are an A rank adventurer, the story would be different.”

For Baren, he should be able to get into action quickly. However, since he was the head of the organization, he couldn’t accept Shin’s information that easily.

“Then, how about this?”

Receiving a probing-like gaze, Shin took out the letter of introduction from Tsuki no Hokora from his Item Box.

“That is…”

Eliza expressed words when she saw the letter of introduction.

“I already have official guarantee that it’s genuine by Guild Master of Bayreuth.”

“…I see, I have no choice but to believe you since this is shown.”

The gaze containing doubt from Baren was erased.

“Don’t you have to verify it?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t have a letter of introduction. But as you said, I can contact Barlux-dono. Even if you tell a lie, I’ll know it immediately.”

“Thank you——”

“Uh huh, from here on I officially announce the declaration of a state of emergency. If the companion whom you said has brought the story to the feudal lord, the army would move immediately. As soon as the report comes, we’ll begin the preparation for the residents’ evacuation. Eliza, please contact the representatives of each guild.”

“Understood.”

Eliza who received the order left the room afterward.

Organization of the army and units, procurement of supplies, and the evacuation of the residents; there were many things that needed to be done from now on.

“What are you going to do hereafter? I guess you’re an upper class Chosen One, right? Please cooperate as I’d like to ask regardless, but…”

“You don’t have to ask. As an upper class Chosen One as you say, you can expect me to help to some extent.”

“That’s reassuring. Then, it would be nice if you have a meeting together with the other Chosen Ones in this city.”

In Baren’s talk, the Chosen Ones that became the main force, because upper class Chosen Ones were not the same as ordinary adventurers or knights, it was said that they would unite in a party between fellow Chosen Ones and fight.

Since they themselves often had weapons for their exclusive use, they didn’t take much time with preparation compared to a common adventurer.

“Now the Chosen Ones protect Balmel, but I’ve heard there is one short..”

“You had known? I’m also concerned about this, but the force increased once you joined. It became somewhat better, is what I’d like to think.”

“My companion is a Chosen One too, so you can count on us.”

“It’s a blessing.”

After inquiring about the location of the shop which the Chosen One ran, Shin left the adventurer’s guild. Even if everyone of them were a Chosen One, it didn’t mean they would be adventurers or knights.

◆◆◆◆

“That’s the place, huh? I’ve seen that signboard somewhere before.”

He said as he went ahead along the street, and found the signboard of the landmark.

At the sole of a paw and small fish which were drawn on the signboard, Shin tilted his head.

“Paw, small fish…Wait, those are, dried small sardines?”

A paw and dried small sardines. To that combination, something flashed inside Shin’s mind.

“The shop’s name is ‘Nyan Da Land’…you say? D-Don’t tell me….”

While remembering the person who shouldn’t be here, Shin opened the shop’s door.

A bell rang and he entered the shop, there, it was a bar with a calm atmosphere. Shin was familiar, no, he was at a loss for a moment how he should move in the interior which he was so familiar with.

“Hm? Customer-san, I am very sorry, but we haven’t opened yet. You can have delicious sake after the sun goes down a little more, okay?”

Shin stiffened at that very moment, a deep voice of a man from the inner part of the store was heard.

Shin was also familiar with this voice, and he turned toward the direction of the voice.

“………Hibineko-san?”

“Certainly, I was called that by a close friend, but…Nyaa Nyaa Nyaa!?”

That person, expressed his surprise with his whole body when he confirmed Shin’s face.

His race was High Beast of cat. As for the appearance, there was no way of expressing it other than a cat walking on two legs and wearing clothes.

His face was mostly white but only the ears were black. A part of the fur on his face had become gray for some reason; it looked like a crack on a split tile.

The reason why Shin called him “Hibineko” was because of the grey patch. His avatar name in-game was ‘Nekomata@Rising’. (T/N: Hibineko literally means crack cat) If only his voice was heard, one would imagined a refined man of middle age, but due to his short stature and his cartoonish costume, he looked like a mascot character of a deformed animal in an amusement park.

Add a exclamation mark floating above the head, and he would become the gag character of a manga.

“Are you a d-double?”

“Who is! Ah, no, but why? Hibineko-san, you were in the death game…”

You should have died.

Though Shin didn’t voice it, he knew he wasn’t mistaken. However, 【Analyze】certainly displayed ‘Nekomata@Rising’.

“Really, you’re Shin-nyaa….?”

“Ah…you’re indeed Hibineko-san…first of all should I stop calling you that name?”

Shin felt that tension dispersed, as “-nyaa” attached to the end of names which was a peculiar way of calling from Hibineko. Even if he thought back to when it was a regular game, he was a player who could change the mood of the area unintentionally.

"*Sigh*, even though I don't understand it well, it's been a long time, Hibineko-san. No, is it better to call you Nekomata@Rising-san?"

"Mugu! To know my sealed true name, you're really Shin-nyaa!"

"I only saw it from【Analyze】. Or perhaps I should say, please stop calling me as Shin-nyaa, seriously."

While communicating like they did in the past, Shin sighed.

"Fumu, it's truly you, Shin… Hey, Shin. I want to confirm only this, have you died?"

"No, I didn't, supposedly."

Shin spoke briefly about what happened to himself after he defeated 'Origin'. He couldn't be dead at least.

"No no, such things…"

"For me, I am concerned why Hibineko-san is here though."

"I don't understand it either. Having lost my life in death game, when I came to myself, I was asleep on a grassy plain. Level, stats, and items. Nothing changed from prior to dying, so I didn't have a hard time while living."

Balmel seemed to be the first place he arrived, it was said that he was active as an adventurer based in here.

"Then, what is this shop?"

"Besides being active as an adventurer, this is matched with my character."

'Nyan Da Land' bar was the name of the shop which Hibineko opened during the game era.

Half of the menu being cat food hadn't changed either.

"And, I became the mark when other players also came."

"Besides you, there are others?!"

Apparently, the situation was on a larger scale than Shin thought.

The players who should have died in the death game or something; it was much more than expected.

“As far as I know it, Shadow-nyaa, Ho-nyaa, Masa-nyaa, Hira-nyaa have certainly come into this world. But…”

“But?”

“There are PK among the people that come as well.”

“PK?!”

The players have come. Hearing that, Shin thought even if they died in the original world, they could at least live in this world, but his expression changed when he heard the following words by Hibineko.

PK or abbreviated of Player Killer; it referred to the act where a player killed another player, or the player who did such an act. This time, it was the latter meaning.

Also, speaking of the PK in the death game era, the majority prefered to kill the villainous people.

“Do you know who has come?”

“I still cannot grasp everything. But it’s no doubt that Hameln has come.”

“That guy has come? It’s going to be troublesome…”

Hameln, Shin who heard that name had his expression stiffen.

The player who was known as a habitual offender of PK-MPK(Monster Player Kill) in the death game era, that’s Hameln.

As a High Pixie, he had more combat power than any upper class Chosen One in this world, though not as much as Schnee.

“Even in this world, he has already been placed on the wanted list in many countries.”

“What did he do?”

Though he was able to expect it without hearing, Shin still asked.

“He brought a large amount of monsters, and attacked a town. It doesn’t seem to be a big town, but it was said that it was a total destruction.”

“That bastard. Even here, he’s doing the same things, huh?”

As Shin, who had a connection as he put an end to Hameln during the death game, he wondered why there was such a player in this world.

“Well, it’s useless even if we think now. Anyway, why did you come to this shop, Shin?”

“Ah, though I think you will be contacted soon, the ‘Flood’ happened. So, it would be nice if you have meeting together with the other Chosen Ones, was what the guild master said.”

“So that’s the case, huh? Then, I’ll call out Shadow-nyaa and the others too.”

Hibineko paused for a short while, and fell silent.

Partly because he was a player too, Shin understood that Hibineko used Mind Chat.

“When I spoke about you, Shin, he said he would come at once.”

“Are they nearby?”

“They are my next-door neighbours. Didn’t you see the signboard?”

“That is, I was paying more attention to the paw signboard..”

“To miss the cafe ‘B&W’, you still have a long way to go, Shin.”

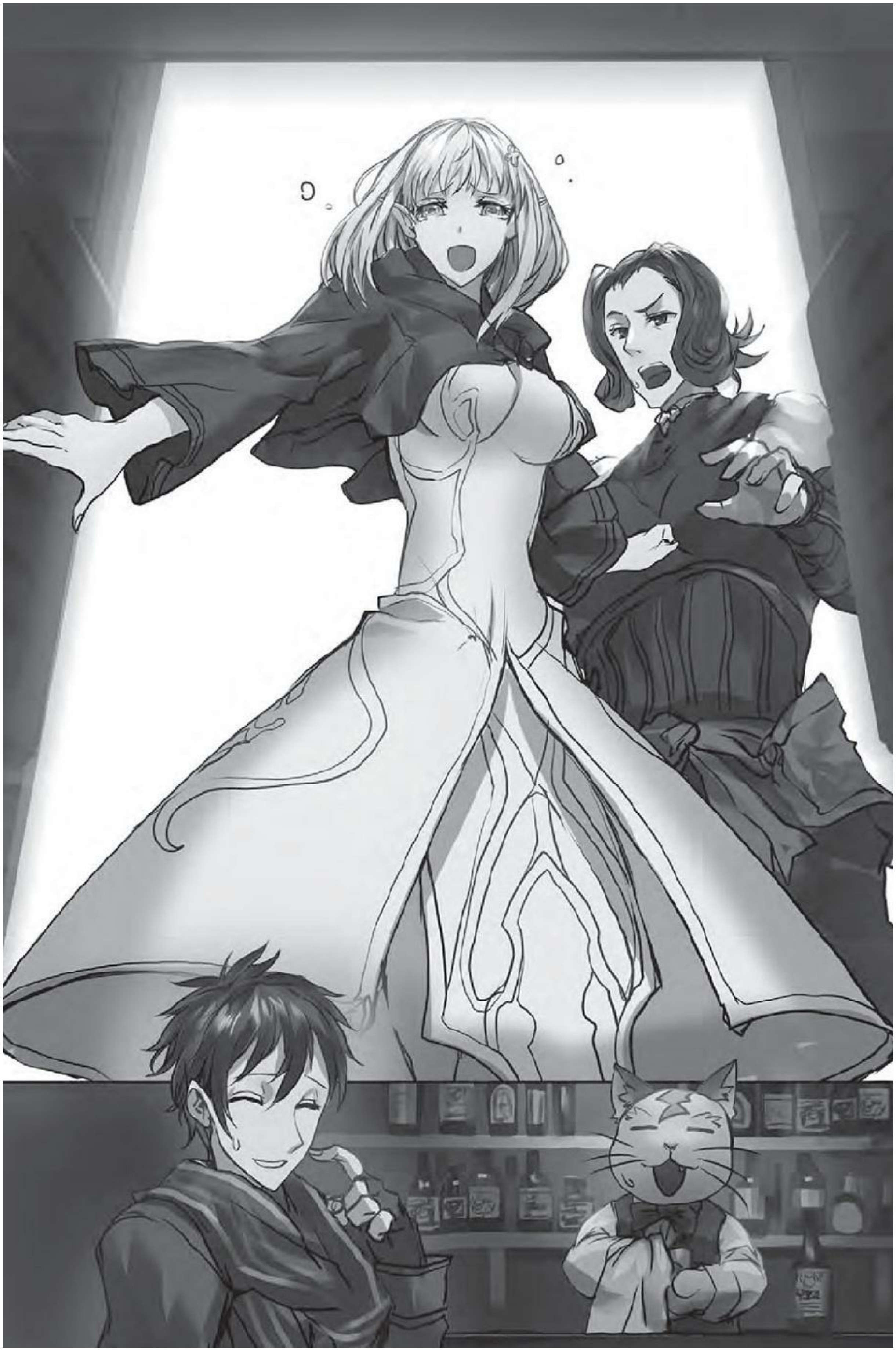
“‘B&W’? That’s the Shadow-san and Holly-san’s shop?”

“That’s right. By the way, they have a daughter too.”

“Seriously?!”

“They have a daughter”, Shin was surprised at that clause.

Even a former player seemed to able to make a child in this world. Just when he tried to ask for a detailed story, the shop’s door was opened forcefully.



“Is it true that Shin-chan is here?!”

“Hey Holly, calm down a bit.”

Entering by kicking the door open were two people, a High Elf and a High Lord.

Having raised a loud yell was the High Elf woman, her white hair waved loosely and her blue transparent eyes were impressive.

What reprimanded her was a High Lord man, having the same black hair and iris as Shin.

The words handsome man and beautiful woman, matched the two people really well.

"Um...Holly-san...if possible, please stop attaching -chan to my name."

It was Holly's habit to put up "-chan" to someone, because Shin had the same nickname to a certain kindergartener, he requested her to correct it whenever being called.

Though she attached "-kun" to his name during their last meeting, she seemed to have completely forgotten it, probably because she was being surprised.

"...Hibineko-san. They look like they're somewhat misunderstanding though.."

"U-Umu, they should hear the story in general about you, Shin."

They seemed to think that Shin probably died and had come to this world. From the tears accumulating in their eyes, there's no mistake about it.

"Hey Holly, Shin has not died. You've heard Hibineko's chat."

"Eh? Is that so?"

To begin with, she had a character that was quickly jumping to wrong conclusions, and that didn't seem to have changed even after she came here.

It was also a common thing for Shadow to rebuke her.

"It's true. At least, I'm certain that my HP didn't become 0 when I came here."

"I'm glad. I certainly thought...but, then why are you here?"

“He’ve said he doesn’t know. Anyway, it’s been a long time, Shin. I’m happy to see you again, but I don’t know whether it’s nice to say..”

While answering Holly’s question, Shadow called out to Shin.

“No, I’m glad to meet you too...Meeting again, it was possible, wasn’t it?”

“I didn’t expect it after I died..”

Shin and Shadow, they had known each other for the longest inside that group. At one time, they made a party together.

Shin was glad to see Shadow and Holly together, and became jealous at the same time.

Even in the real world, Shadow and Holly were a married couple, their good relationship was famous among companions. Despite dying and ending up in a another world, they could still be here together, Shin was a little jealous.

(Well, his circumstances are slightly different than mine.)

Shin almost hoped for a reunion like those two, and shrugged his shoulders a little to restrain himself.

“First of all, I am delighted with our reunion here, but the situation at the moment is a little..”

“That’s right. When I heard the ‘Flood’ took place, I couldn’t calm down either.”

Shadow also changed his expression.

“Has the adventurer’s guild made their move?”

“Yes, my companion has also told the feudal lord, too. Each guild should be contacted soon.”

“As expected, you’re quick to respond. But Shin-kun, did Guild Master believe in your story?”

“As for that, I showed him this.”

Shin took out the letter of introduction of Tsuki no Hokora in front of Holly.

When that was seen, everyone nodded as having consented.

“I see. You already went to your ‘home’.”

“It was near the place where I woke up, so I went there first. I also have met Schnee already.”

All three of them seemed to know the situation of Tsuki no Hokora; Holly and the others wanted to hear the detailed story from Shin.

However, because it was not a time to be carefree, Shin ignored Holly’s gaze and returned to the conversation.

“I’ve already told this to the guild master, but the majority of the monsters were humanoids such as Goblins and Ogres. Anyway, you should be careful of their number. It was a number that wasn’t seen even in an event of the game.”

“That’s the feature of the ‘Flood’ which breeds a large amount of low-level monsters. Though we, the melee-type, would have a difficult time corresponding to the attack, it seems we don’t have to worry with Shin here.”

“Shouldn’t you destroyed them when you came across them?”

Shadow said in neither joking nor in a serious tone.

“No, actually, my companion in question is the second princess of Bayreuth Kingdom. To use my power in front of such person is still..”

“Will she be afraid or praise it? Either way, it will be mayhem. High Humans here seem to be treated like half Gods. Shin-kun’s support character, Schnee-chan, is very famous, you know?”

“Yeah, besides, even now she still held full interest toward me. As Shadow-san says, I intend to prevent war sacrifices too, but I don’t want to be discovered.”

It was said, no matter how much the number were, most of them were small fry which didn’t reach level 100. He could burn them down using a wide range magic skill.

As why that wasn't done earlier, it was because Rionne was nearby.

"A man with power, is difficult in every ages. For the matter of the second princess, I heard she isn't that corrupted to that extent though.."

Following Shadow, Hibineko began to talk.

"Well, the placement probably will be different from us when it comes to a royal family. I dare say, we ought to be together as the dispatch group."

The group of dispatch were the Chosen Ones assigned to various places by turns. The mage and the magic swordsman which Rionne mentioned before fell under that.

"That's good then."

"If I say that we're acquaintances, it's almost settled with the princess becoming separated. A hastily made party and a party with cooperation, the battle results are greatly different. The guild master also understands that situation."

"I wonder if we would become a hindrance instead…Didn't Schnee-chan come?"

"She is in Bayreuth now. It's also why I'm here, it seems like a demon was in the royal palace."

"Demon?"

Shadow reacted to Shin's remark.

Neither Hibineko nor Holly spoke, but they seemed to be surprised similarly.

"I heard in Schnee's story, 500 years from the natural disaster, she didn't come across it at all."

"Hm, we haven't heard of it either."

In addition to Hibineko's words, Shadow and Holly nodded too.

Though they didn't understand what was happening, demons having begun to move again was not a good premonition. Just to make sure, he also informed them of what was in the royal palace.

"A Count class, huh? If that's the case, we should able be handle of it."

"Although anything higher than that, we've only ever fought in dungeons or for quests."

"The terrain has changed now, we don't know the reason. In all the dungeons that we have visited in this world, there never been something like this."

Three people looked at each other and frowned.

"Well, I think it's better than not knowing, but please put it in the corner of your mind for the time being. You may have to give priority even more soon."

Since he couldn't find solution even if he thought, the demon matter was put on hold for the time being.

"For now, let me take charge of strengthening your weapons and armor which you're using now."

"Is it fine?"

"I'm here this time, but I don't know what will happen hereafter. I think there's no loss to reinforce them. Of course, you can expect it to be good as I will do it seriously."

Shin was there this time. Though the preparation made by the guild and the feudal lord were wasted, he didn't intend to increase the victims and the like from the start.

Shin's attention was already focused on the 'Flood' which would eventually happen again.

"F-Fumu…Shin is serious huh? A fearful weapons will probably be completed, although it's reliable."

"I'm afraid to hand over my weapon."

Hibineko and Shadow said in a slightly restless voice.

Because they didn't know Shin's ability completely, what kind of magic remodeling would Shin subject their favorite weapons to? Such uneasiness flashed across their head.

"Please take care of my weapon! Even if Shin-kun is not here, we will defend this place!"

Unlike the men who were sweating from their foreheads, Holly with an expression full of motivation, handed over a weapon which was still in card state to Shin immediately.

There was not any trace of anxiety towards the magic remodeling seen.

"You can count on me."

Shin also received the cards from Shadow and Hibineko, and put them away in his Item Box at once.

He intended to make Tsuki no Hokora appear, to work in the night as he sneaked out from Balmel.

"Ah, that's right. I'll introduce you my partner later."

"Partner? If it's Schnyaa-san, I know her."

"Isn't it possible for monster to be tamed if you have the job Tamer? It's that."

Shin told Hibineko, who heard 'partner' and imagined Schnee, that he tamed a monster.

"Hoho, I didn't think there is a monster could catch Shin's eyes."

While playing with his mustache, Hibineko smiled with great interest.

"It wasn't a very strong monster, right?."

"Fumu, is it the Mist Garuda around here?"

They being immensely curious also didn't change here, Holly and Shadow voiced their ideas too.

"Please wait a moment, I'll call it now."

Saying so, Shin connected via telepathy between partners to Yuzuha.

“(This is Shin. Yuzuha, can you hear me?)”

“(Ku? Wha?)”

“(I’ll introduce you to my acquaintances, and I want to summon you here, is it okay?)”

“(Wait a minute…*clonk*, Schnee-oneechan, Tiera-oneechan, see you later)”

For a short while, Yuzuha seemed to get confirmation from Schnee and Tiera.

“Then, here it comes. Contract beast summon!”

When Shin chanted the incantation, a summoning formation with a complicated pattern was drawn at his feet.

Normally, Yuzuha should have appear at Shin’s feet, but——

“Kyaah!!”

“Kuu!?”

“Ha? ——Whoa!”

Just as Shin thought he heard a short scream, his face was wrapped in something soft, and his view became dark.

His posture broke and he fell onto the ground. Besides the sound of Shin falling, the sound of something dropping resounded inside the shop.

“Ouch…What…on earth…Master!! What happened?”

When Tiera looked up while her eyes moistened because of pain, there was the figure of Schnee whose breasts enveloped Shin’s head.

“…Tsui”

“Don’t “Tsui” me, ah, geez! Please release Shin, he seems to be in pain!”

He likely couldn’t breath. Shin tapped Schnee’s back repeatedly.

“Mm mmm! Mm mmm!” voice omitted from her chest, “Give up! I give up!” was also heard.

“T-This is, I only hear it from the rumor, is this heaven or hell?”

Shin who was freed from Schnee’s embrace, murmured while gasping for breath.

Because it was the timing when he just breathed out, he was about to be suffocated seriously.

The beginning was heaven, and the end was hell. As a matter of fact, if he had wanted to avoid it, he could have, but it was a secret only for Shin.

“…Um, what kind of situation is this?”

Shadow, Holly and Hibineko who had stiffened by Schnee and the other’s sudden appearance, among them, the first one to reboot was Holly.

“Oh, I don’t have a clue either.”

While fixing his disordered breathing, Shin answered.

Indeed, he didn’t expect Schnee and Tiera to appear together with Yuzuha.

“About that, I..”

Schnee started to explain as if nothing had happened.

According to her, Tiera and her seemed to have been pulled into the summoning formation around Yuzuha. Normally only the partner becomes the target for transition, and it appeared that the two people were recognized as existences similar to Yuzuha for some reason.

“It’s just a guess, but isn’t it because of them being inside the summoning formation?”

“They were swallowed by the summoning formation, huh?”

"The summoning formation had a one mel diameter, so Tiera and I were indeed inside the summoning formation."

"...Come to think of it, Cashmere talked about such a thing."

Shin recalled the words of the summoner and tamer of Rokuten, Cashmere.

"When calling your partner, if there are other partners in the summoning formation, they may appear together sometimes. Although it doesn't seem to be a bug."

The contents should be like this, and Shin confirmed that his memory was not mistaken.

Perhaps, it was meant to be in THE NEW GATE from the start.

"Oh dear! I'm not bored when Shin is around."

"Indeed."

Hibineko and Shadow who came to their senses, said in an amazed way.

"Everyone, I haven't seen you for a long time."

"Schnyaa-san too, hasn't changed a bit."

"Next time, tell me about when you met with Shin-kun again, okay?"

To see Schnee exchange voice casually, Shin had a sudden thought.

"Hey Schnee, did you know that Hibineko and the others had come to this place?"

"Yes. Concerning Shin's friend, I heard a lot of stories."

"Then I wished you said it a little earlier. Well, it can't be helped since there was Girard's matter, too."

If he knew that there were players other than himself, Shin would have taken a different course of actions.

However, because he had no choice but to meet Girard whose death was approaching, he didn't intend to scold her.

"I am very sorry. I had no intention of covering it up, but I couldn't get an opportunity to tell you..."

"Now now, a man shouldn't worry about a trifling thing. Leaving that aside, I want you to introduce that little fox-chan and elf-chan quickly to me."

Was she aware of what's inside Schnee's mind? Holly requested for Tiera's and Yuzuha's introduction.

"I get it. I assume you already know Schnee, so I will omit her, this young fox is Yuzuha, and this elf is Tiera."

"Kuu!"

"I am Tiera Lucent."

Yuzuha barked cheerfully, and Tiera bowed politely.

"Then next is this one. The one who looks like he has a crack on his head is Nekomata-san, we call him Hibineko-san. That is the High Elf Holly-san, and next to her is the High Lord Shadow-san."

"I am Nekomata, I'm also called Hibineko by everyone."

"I'm Holly, I hope to get along with you, Tiera-chan."

"Shadow. Come to my house if you're hungry."

Then, Tiera dropped her sight, looking at her own feet.

"I'll introduce my partner too. Kagerou, come out."

Answering the call, Kagerou in puppy mode appeared from Tiera's shadow.

"This puppy is Kagerou, although he's small now. His original form is very enormous."

"Gruu!"

Kagerou barked, and made sure it matched Tiera's introduction.

"His monster name is Gruefago."

"What?"

“WHAT!?”

“Nyaan!?”

To the content which Shin told as an addition, the three former players raised a voice of astonishment.

Even the advanced players would be on their guard against the divine beast; it was a strange scene when it was being held by a beautiful elf girl like a puppy, but the three people’s【Analyze】displayed Kagerou’s name and level without an error.

“Oh, oh dear my my, such a cute pup is that Gruefago?”

“Yes, I think he can change his body size at will.”

“Tiera-san is a Chosen One too?”

“No, I’m just an ordinary elf unlike Shin.”

“She is not a Chosen One, so how could she tame a Gruefago?”

“Okay okay, that’s it! Please ask the questions afterwards!”

Shin forced his way through in front of Holly, Hibineko and Shadow who were pressing for answers.

He was certain that Tiera would be barraged with questions if he left them alone. It was only natural that only Holly kept shifting the contents of the questions.

“The number of people increased somehow, let’s sit down and talk at least.”

When Shin said that, Shadow and Holly nodded.

“Then come to my shop. It’s a special reunion, so I will show my skill.”

“That’s right, since the shop is closed today, we can talk a little bit. There’s still time until the monsters come, right?”

“...If you said there is still time, then I will accept your offer here.”

There was a delay of at least four or five days before the group of monsters arrived at Balmel.

Before one knew it, Rionne's impatience seemed have moved to Shin, too.

"The summon of the adventurers, the formation of the armies, the accommodation of the supplies, all of this takes time to deal with, but it probably will be all right today at least."

"Then, let's go."

Following Shadow and Holly, the party entered 'B&W' cafe. Different from the 'Nyan Da Land', it was a coffee shop with a relaxed atmosphere. The wall that faced the street was glass-sided, though the inside of the shop could be seen, the curtain was closed now.

A "Closed" sign was hung up when the door was opened and they entered the shop; it was also a scene which Shin knew very well. The shop had a clean impression with white as the base, and hadn't changed at all since the game era.

Even if it was said that the shop was just brought as it was, there was almost no strange feeling.

"...You have reproduced it well here."

"I think it was well-balanced even if I say so myself. But this is all in favor of Rokuten before Shin-kun arrived here."

"Rokuten?"

Shin had no idea at all, and couldn't help but tilt his head for Holly's words.

"The 'Golden Company' exist because Reed of Rokuten built it, right? These various accommodations were thanks to Shin and his acquaintances."

"'Golden Company', huh?...That reminds me, what are the other guys' support characters doing?"

Hearing the story from Shadow and Hibineko, Shin remembered the other support characters of Rokuten now.

"Schnee, do you know something?"

He asked Schnee while sitting down on a chair.

“Reed-sama’s follower, Berett, remain with ‘Golden Company’, Cook-sama’s follower, Keritori and Zaji run a restaurant ‘Shigure Shop’. The others, Cashmere-sama’s follower, Busy and Cain-sama’s follower, Raster, were maintaining the monsters’ nurture at Rashugum. That is all I know. As for the information about Shin, I think Berett knows the whole content, since we had an arrangement to share through the ‘Golden Company’.”

“...Hey, I heard Rashugum just now, does that place remain too?”

In the middle of the talk, Shin voiced his question.

“Yes, because it was originally floating in the sky, it didn’t receive the influence of the crustal movement. It has a wide area, so Busy evacuated the monsters that lost their breeding ranch there. As a result, it is called a Dragon Nest now.”

“Oi oi... well, it’s a fitting name for the place.”

The Rashugum Schnee talked about, was one of the guild houses of Rokuten.

In the game era, there was no limit on the number of guild houses. So, having multiple guild houses to certain scale, one guild house could be expanded endlessly and was divided up into the guild which continued to be strengthened.

In Rokuten, six bases were especially arranged, it became one person would manage one base.

And, the Rashugum, the sixth guild house, was ‘Silver Summoner’ Cashmere’s responsibility, the official name was “Type 6 Sky Castle Rashugum”. It was called “Castle” among companions, as it was literally a flying castle.

“Since half of the raised monsters are from the dragon species, saying it is a nest isn’t wrong either.”

"Indeed. Then Schnee, if that's the case, is my 'Studio' somewhere, too?"

About the 'Studio', it was "Type 1 Mysterious Studio Demi Eden" which Shin being in charge of.

"I looked for it, but it has not been found yet. We cannot transition to the guild house alone."

Originally, the guild house was exclusive for players' use. If the support character was together with the player, transfer was possible, but it was not possible to be used by a single support character unlike a general transition point.

Anyway, if it was a game, one could be deployed to some places, just by operating menu.

"If it's the 'Shrine', it should have become the headquarter of the church now."

"The church!?"

Shin's expression changed from the Hibineko's remark.

From the priest who was running from the Golems they encountered the other day or Rashia who he got to know through a request and so on, Shin was strangely connected to the church people, he was not quite convinced that one of their guild houses was being used without permission.

'Shrine' was an alias, the official name was "Type 4 Forest Palace Palm Luck". It was the fourth guild house, and a shrine type. It was the facility which the "Blue Magician" Cain was in charge of.

"Hibineko-san, do you know to what extent the facilities are being used?"

"They haven't grasped control of the central area at least. I heard most of the rooms are sealed."

"Do you know anything, Schnee?"

"No, because I kept my distance from the church, so.."

Though it was heard that they had trouble in the past, it seemed she hadn’t gone to their headquarters yet.

“About that, I know it.”

Holly raised her small hand in place of Hibineko and Schnee.

“When I came to this world, what was the closest to me was the church headquarter city, Sigurd. Since I lived there for a while, I had the chance to go to the Shrine.”

When she helped with the distribution of food after an emergency that the church performed, she seemed to have been invited by a priest she knew.

The invitation was also due to Holly’s race as a High Elf, which was known to be a good-natured race, and also served as a variety of solicitation, she explained.

“In a story I heard, and when I think about matching what I saw from a visit, the building itself was seen as important. Looks likes only parts of the gate and hall seem to be useable for everyone.”

“That wouldn’t be entire building”, Holly added and sipped the coffee prepared by Shadow.

“I don’t know how much that building was influenced by the natural disaster, but as far as I can tell after hearing Holly’s story, I think the Shrine’s functions haven’t stopped even if it isn’t complete.”

“May I ask why?”

“It was famous among some players, so I don’t mind. The building that Cain built maintains the functions in the facilities using a core, and when the core is destroyed or breaks down, the building would start self-destructing.”

To Hibineko’s question, Shin answered without pausing in between lines.

Cain’s reason was, “Such things cannot be made in reality, so I decided to build in THE NEW GATE!” was what he said.

His real life architect's blood seemed to tingle with excitement to a strange direction. In case of an invasion, the Shrine together with the enemy would collapse, was what he seemed to have wanted to try.

In the end, there was no opportunity for that to happen.

"That's why, the core of the building is safe for now. Only the members of Rokuten or their support characters should be able to use the important facilities, so I think it is locked. Perhaps, as Holly says, only parts of it can be used, huh?...Were the unique items sold?"

If the whole facilities were available, it would be unimaginable according to this world's common sense when various stuff revealed.

"Yes, I have investigated it a little, but there wasn't anything strange was sold. Only things such as the standard potion of this world and also antidotes."

"I think my guess is correct if that's the case then."

"In the first place, I don't think the dwellers of this world able to do anything to the Rokuten's guild houses."

Shadow who brought foods suddenly spoke a few words, and everyone in that place gave a bitter smile.

It might be possible that the residents of this world were able to operate it by accident, but there's no way such a thing would happen. Even that was difficult for former players, but even more for the residents of this world.

"Dishes have arrived, shall we eat?"

"Though it couldn't be compared to Schnee-san's, it's my best ability."

The dishes were arranged on a table, and Shin gulped his saliva.

During the three days leaving Kalkia, he only had simple meals like an ordinary traveler. Though dishes could be made into a card too, he couldn't put it out because Rionne was there.

"Well then, itadaki—"

“I’m home!”

Just when he about to eat the dishes, the shop’s door was flunged open in a big way.

It was an elf girl around 15 years old that raised a cheerful voice. White hair, black pupils, and pointed ears, and not one freckle on that fair skin; she had the features of a general elf in THE NEW GATE.

“Oh? Customer-san?”

The elf girl looked puzzled at Shin who was going to clasp his hands for prayer.

Her white hair which was tied behind her head swayed like a puppy’s tail.

“Ara, you’re early.”

“Mother, is the shop closed today?”

“They are my friends. We would eat together because we haven’t met for a long time. This is Shin. And the young elven woman is Tiera.”

There was no introduction of Schnee. It seemed they already knew each other.

“This child is our daughter, Kaede”

“I am Kaede Kurosawa. Nice to meet you!”

Kaede introduced herself in a lively tone.

What could be called a positive mood seemed to overflow from her whole body.

“I’m Shin. I’m a close friend to Holly-san and the others.”

“I’m Tiera Lucent. Hope to get along with you.”

To the Kaede who was brimming with energy, Shin and Tiera naturally smiled.

She appeared to be the type that lightened the surroundings in a sense unlike Holly.

"Schnee-san too, long time no see."

"Yes, you have grown taller again."

"No, I haven't grown that much taller. I envy Schnee-san."

Said Kaede as she look at Schnee's chest.

As expected, it probably caught her eyes even as a member of the same sex. Therefore, it shouldn't because Kaede's chest size was below standard.

"You are still in your growing period, it will be in the future."

"If that's the case, then it's good."

After such an exchange, Kaede also joined them for meal.

"That reminds me, her last name is Kurosawa, right?"

"Using only character names is dull, isn't it?"

"Mitomi was also fine though."

"Rejected."

Holly instantly rejected Shadow's opinion.

Kurosawa was Shadow's and Mitomi was Holly's last name in the real world.

Though it was possible to give one's name as the real name, since the character name appeared by【Analyze】in this world, it seemed to attach Kurosawa when the name was spoken.

When the meal was over, Kaede went to her room, and Shin and the others also began to prepare for the 'Flood'.

He planned to upgrade the weapons at night, so he decided to do something other than that.

"For now, I think I'll go to the 'Golden Company'. Schnee, please tell the feudal lord and the guild master that you will be participates in the war. If Schnee is here, the soldiers' morale would be raised too and the residents should feel relieved."

“Understood. What would you do afterwards?”

“How should an adventurer like me move? I’ll ask in the guild. If there is a past document incidentally, I’ll go check it.”

What role did an adventurer play in the ‘Flood’, Shin didn’t know it.

Was it reserve force in the case of an emergency or search and destroy missions? Because he couldn’t expect an organized movement like from the army, it shouldn’t be so far off the mark.

Chosen Ones may have a different possibility, but there’s no loss in knowing it.

“What will Hibineko-san do?”

“We will work on converting materials into cards. I wish the opportunity to use them never arises though.”

Shadow added.

“If you say materials, they’re boulders and oil to drop from the top of the rampart, right?”

“Ah, indeed.”

At the time of the attack to drop something from the top of the wall, if they were defeated in the war at the plain, and had to retreat to the castle due to an unfavorable situation.

Therefore, when there was an opportunity to use it, they would be in trouble. However, because any measures had been taken care of, the preparations seemed solid.

Also, because of they were already considerably stocked up, it didn’t take much time.

“Has it been attacked to the point of using it so far?”

“One time in the past, I heard it was a battle to the very limit. The story goes that they could not cope with the numerous groups.”

“Is is a pattern like that this time too?”

“Looks like it. Well, we won’t be cornered this time probably.”

The others were also in agreement with Hibineko who smiled wryly.

Shin, Hibineko and the others were former players. In addition to Schnee, there was Gruefago, a divine beast. They wouldn't lose.

"By the way, should we decide the next meeting time?"

"No, there will be no problem to act respectively. When there is a special summon from the guild, the guild card will emit a magic power. At that time, you should go to the guild."

What Hibineko was saying was that it was the call function which informed of the state of emergency.

"When there is an urgent business, I'll use the message card. You have some of them left, right?"

"Yes, certainly."

Shadow and the others were players after all, they seemed to notice the usefulness of the message card as well as Shin.

"What will Tiera do?"

"I would like to do something if possible. I wonder if I should tend to my weapon afterward."

"May I ask you to pick an inn?"

"I don't mind since I'm the most free here."

When they confirmed what to do, their own course of action started.

◆◆◆◆

Shin asked Hibineko the location of the Golden Company, and he went there without getting sidetracked.

When he went along the road as instructed, a really shiny signboard caught his attention.

"What a conspicuous sign."

On the signboard, which was painted entirely black and had a golden border, the words 'Golden Company' were also written in gold.

Because the letters were shining excessively, it stood out the most; it was rather dazzling.

Yuzuha, who was on top of Shin’s head, was also overwhelmed by this, closing its eyes trying not to look at the signboard.

“(My eyes are starting to sting~)”

“(When I stare at it for a while, my eyes also start to itch——hm?)”

Next to the shop, he saw that a box with goods was loaded onto a wagon in a hurry.

They were probably informed by the Adventurer’s Guild, and they were getting ready to transport the supplies.

What interested Shin was the person who was issuing the instructions next to the wagon.

The merchant, who had put on a robe with golden embroidery attached, looked familiar to Shin.

“——these to the port; after it arrives at the other side, do as you were instructed. I’m counting on you.”

When Shin approached him, he seemed to just finish issuing instructions and turning toward Shin conveniently.

The information that was shown by【Analyze】was already displayed in Shin’s view.

Name: Berett Kilmar Level: 255

With a chubby look and a charming smile, if he were not a merchant, he would have had the impression that he was a gourmet reporter. It was impossible to tell by his appearance, but Shin knew his race was High Elf.

Though his main job was merchant, he was actually a character a little off from the usual practice, as his sub job was dark knight.

“Excuse me, I’d like to ask a little but..”

“Yes, what!!? … Well well, long time no see.”

When he tried to answer Shin's greeting, Berett paused for a moment. However, he was the Golden Company's assistant manager. His expression immediately changed into a smile and bowed to Shin.

"The day when we are able to meet again, I was looking forward to it. Now now, we can't talk at ease in this place. This way, please, and take your companion with you too."

"Ah, yes, understood."

"Kuu!"

Shin avoided using overly familiar words partly because it was their first meeting in this world, but Berett guided Shin to the reception room personally without breaking his humble attitude.

There were no flashy things like the signboard appearance inside the room; the layout was harmonious.

When the two people entered the room, the door was knocked on almost immediately.

"Excuse me. I have brought a drink."

"Enter."

Hearing Berett's voice, a lady wearing employee's clothes entered the room.

According to【Analyze】, her name was Pyuri. Judging from her pointy ears, she was probably an elf or a High Elf.

After Pyuri put out tea and cake, which were loaded into the wagon, she left the room quietly.

"From the viewpoint of everyone in Rokuten, this would be cheap tea."

"No, there's no need for such a thing."

Saying so, Shin tilted the cup. When he took a sip of that reddish liquid, faint sweetness and bitterness spread inside his mouth.

"This is spectacular."

"I use the best tea leaves in the area. Above all, I'm glad that you like it. Leaving that aside, Shin-sama, it's unnecessary to be so formal. Honorifics don't apply to other people."

"...Well, that's more comfortable, but.."

"Then, I ask you to be like that. If honorifics are spoken by the people of Rokuten, myself included, everyone would be ashamed.

Berett seemed to be thorough on the position where one stands, such as master and servant. Would it be different between Shin and Reed?

"So, how may I help you today?"

"Ah, I wanted you to tell me the current state of Rokuten's support characters besides mine. I have heard the things about the 'Shigure Shop', Busy, and Rasta from Schnee."

"All right, but we don't know anything except the one just came in. Oxygen and Hydro should be in 'Garden', but it's currently being treated as a danger zone. We couldn't come close to the 'Garden' to confirm it, so we don't have enough evidence to verify the information. 'Studio', 'Ship', and 'Base's' whereabouts are unknown. Though I can confirm the existence of 'Shrine and 'Castle' under the current state, only 'Castle' can be secured."

The guild houses were as big as there was. If it wasn't found, it was probably buried underground or had sunk to the bottom of the sea.

"I see. I will keep searching for the 'Studio'. As for the 'Garden', what makes it dangerous?"

"It's because a harmful gas is generated around the 'Garden'. All are above VII abnormal state. The center is expected to become the maximum X. If I considered the fighting power and the resistance force, Schnee may be able to break through, but she still cannot stay long. For sure, if it's the resistance force of High Human class like Shin-sama, it would be different..."

The gases were generated by the surroundings, and seemed to have a quite powerful effect.

If Berett’s story was true, it was indeed not possible to break through unless it was Shin.

“Since there are also food production facilities inside, they, at the very least, won’t starve to death…I’m sorry for not being able to help much.”

“Well, I’m satisfied, it’s enough just to have heard about ‘Garden’.”

‘Garden’ was originally for the guild war use, traps were prepared around it.

Perhaps, it had malfunctioned. Because the inside is air-tight, they wouldn’t be hurt by the gas.

The detailed location of ‘Garden’ was given and he kept note.

“Being able to listen to a lot of stuff saved us a lot of trouble. If something happens, please send me a message card.”

“Understood. I will prepare it for you.”

“I’ll rely on you. That reminds me, do you come here often? I didn’t expect to encounter you so abruptly.”

“I just had to come here for some business. At that time, I was informed by the merchant guild that the ‘Flood’ happened, so I was issuing instructions in order to cope.”

Because precious fish could be caught at this time, he always came over personally. If he kept scuffling through the documents in the head office, his intuition as a merchant would dull or something like that.

“It is an opportunity, but it is also because it's something I was asked to do by Schnee.”

“Something she asked?”

“Yes, this should be reported to Shin-sama, too.”

When he said so, Berett rung the bell which was place on the edge of the table. Then, the door was knocked on in less than one minute.

“Excuse me for being rude. What can I do for you?”

The one entered was Pyuri who brought the tea.

“Bring me ‘that’.”

“Right away.”

Replying promptly to Berett’s words, Pyuri left the room.

He didn’t say anything about what he wanted her to bring specifically, but as long as there was no miscommunication between the two, there was no need to be worried.

A few minutes later, the door was knocked on again and Pyuri enter the room. She held a small envelope in her hand.

“Thank you. You may leave.”

When he made Pyuri leave, Berett opened the envelope and took out the contents inside, and he presented it to Shin.

“This is a list of players who came to this world.”

“What?”

Shin’s expression changed when he heard “players”.

He read the list he received from Berett slowly from top to the bottom.

“...Is that all?”

Shin finished reading the list, but asked Berett with a face that was perplexed.

“That’s a reasonable question. If I have to say honestly, we’re at a loss, too. The deceased in the event which players called the death game ended with 100 or 200 people. If that's the case, the players that have come here are just a really small fraction of it. Of course, not everyone was mentioned in the list.”

Shin recognized every player on the list that he held. Though he was surprised that only former players were there, what was the list aiming for?

(Have those guys, who were involved with me in the game era, come here?) Though Berett said it wasn’t everything, as expected, Shin, too, couldn’t hide his agitation.

“Also, please check this.”

To Shin, who had a serious look on his face, Berett held out another paper. Though there were fewer names written down than that of the first list, a horizontal line was drawn for several names.

“This is?”

“It should be clear by now; this list is for what Shin-sama and players call PK.”

“PK you say!?”

Shin looked through the list while being surprised. There was Hameln at the top of the list, and several names Shin knew were on the list.

“(Shin, what is a *Pi Kay*?)”

“(...Guys who murdered others and enjoyed it.)”

Shin replied to Yuzuha’s question briefly. The words were a little hard for Yuzuha to say, and its vocal tone seemed to change even in the Mind Chat.

Did it understand the atmosphere? Yuzuha barked a small “Kuu...” and become quiet.

“Have you checked this individually?”

“Yes. In fact, when the first player was found, it was Schnee who insisted that I should look for PKs first.”

“Schnee did?”

Though Schnee said that there were no opportunities, no matter how much Shin looked at it, she was not incompetent enough to not convey such an important story as players or PKs forever. If she said that she didn't have an opportunity or something, she should have had plenty of them.

As expected, there may have been something.

“From your appearance, I guess Schnee hasn’t told Shin-sama about this, right?”

“Yes, I only knew about the dead players living by chance.”

Then, Berett erased his smile.

“…If I say as a fellow follower of Rokuten, not conveying such important information intentionally is clear evidence of disloyalty to her own master, as such a thing shouldn’t happen. Even though she is Shin-sama’s follower, it doesn’t mean she is clear from being punished.”

Berett said in a solemn tone.

Shin was troubled. He had a conjecture that Schnee was hiding something, but he didn’t know how other followers of Rokuten felt.

“What is Shin-sama thinking?”

“…Schnee wouldn’t do such a thing without any reason is what I’m thinking.”

Anyway, it would not be strange when that information came to light.

The guild usually included portraits of wanted criminals such as Hameln. Even without Schnee telling him, Shin before long would find out.

When Shin spoke about what he thought, Berett‘s expression changed completely from the moments ago when he said Schnee should be punished, and it became more gentle.

“Certainly, judging from Schnee’s nature, I also think she would not conceal information to harm Shin-sama.”

It seemed that there was no objection.

“…Hey Berett, do you know anything?”

Shin, who felt something was wrong in Berett’s manner, asked directly. Berett, who was questioned, nodded without change in his expression.

“Yes, I think I know.”

“Do I punish her after knowing the circumstances?”

“As a Rokuten’s follower, I think that’s proper.”

“Then, how about you as an individual?”

“I also understand her.”

It seemed it depended on the place where Berett stood. At least, it didn’t seem to be the reason why he couldn’t sympathize at all.

“If I was in the same situation as Schnee, I cannot assert that I would not do the same thing.”

“She is unqualified as a follower, is what you’re saying as a friend, huh?”

“Rather than being unqualified, I think it’s because she is a follower under your direct control. Shin-sama, the list in your hand, don’t you remember those people, especially the ones with names crossed?”

Shin, again, looked at the names which were crossed.

Kagemaru.

Jay Son

Telfon.

Even compared to the other names, Shin remembered them.

“Shin-sama, do you remember once being called ‘The God of Death’?”

“It was way back when I was last called like that…Yes, I see. These guys are…”

Shin recalled those days, and noticed.

“The people whom I killed?”

Though it was a vague memory, they were all PKs or otherwise members of PK guilds who fought again Shin.

“Forgive me if I say something rude, but Shin-sama’s appearance at that time was completely different from your usual self.

If Berett had an ego like he did currently, he would have wanted to run away quickly even as a support character, Shin at that time seemed to be enveloped in a dangerous atmosphere.

“Schnee knows what causes Shin-sama’s appearance to become so. Besides, even now she still regrets it that she was not able to do anything, despite being the closest to you.”

“That…”

It couldn’t be helped.

No one would argue against that, but it’s probably not at all acceptable from her point of view.

“To Schnee, the days when Shin-sama met with these people, she was afraid that you’d return to be like another person. Thus, she was likely trying to handle it herself without telling Shin-sama.”

Berett said, tasting the drink and putting it down in one beat.

“…Seeing for myself, Schnee’s feelings to Shin-sama were something that couldn’t be concluded with the single word of loyalty. As she knows of the state you had changed into, she couldn't ignore the people who had caused such changes and tell it to Shin-sama."

"That's me at that time, huh? ...Well, looking at it objectively, isn't it a dangerous story?"

As for Schnee trying not to get Shin involved, it was understandable when hearing the reason.

Shin, at that time, believed that defeating PKs was more important than clearing the game —— No, he moved for the purpose of killing.

He had not a fragment of morals, taboo, or such ideas; he had no hesitation, killing without pardon.

"There were players with Shin-sama who acted together at that time too."

Yes, PKK(Player Killer Killer) —— Shin alone was the player who killed PKs, but he didn't do everything alone. Shadow, whom he met again at Balmel, was also one of the players who cooperated with Shin.

There was always a person who sought revenge but lacked the power, or a person who lacked information, even with sufficient power. The person who held grudges against PKs became frantic and cooperated in PK killings.

There was no system for the law to judge, or the police to catch the criminals in the game. Therefore, some victims went for severe retaliatory actions.

"I see."

When there was such a reason, one wouldn't think speaking about players and PKs proactively.

Shin wasn't able to bring himself to punish Schnee at least.

"Even if Schnee normally should have disclosed it to you directly, I told you because a fact is a fact."

"You, taking this opportunity or something, actually intended to say this from the beginning, weren't you?"

“Oh?! What do you mean?”

Berett feigned ignorance with a friendly grin on his face. However, the smile that Shin should have recognized was slightly suspicious now.

“What if I listened to that sort of crazy talk? I understand that Schnee didn’t think this through.”

“Shin-sama was well-known for taking good care of your followers. Above all, Schnee is the longest-serving member.”

“Ku, that smile on your face irritates me.”

It was a smile that should have formed a sense of closeness, as it was expressed on Berett as always, but it made Shin somewhat irritated to the appearance that seemed to want to say “I understand”.

“To that extent, it’ll be the evidence that Shin-sama is loved.”

“Keep saying that!”

Shin replied Berett’s words curtly.

“By the way, is Shin-sama participating in this ‘Flood’?”

“Hm? Yes, I intend to intervene but..”

Berett, who was able to change the topic abruptly, had a contemplative look.

“Then, could you leave a part to the army without hunting everything?”

Berett kept silent for a while, and mentioned that kind of thing.

Because he knew Shin’s true nature, he understood that Shin’s remark of intervening meant annihilation.

“What is your reason?”

“It’ll become military training because only few ‘Floods’ were used to raise the levels of the soldiers.”

Though Shin thought Balmel would be in danger if one wrong move was made, there were upper class Chosen Ones keeping watch so that wouldn’t happen.

“It would be hard leveling, you know?”

“In the Melt Mountains, which is the domain of a divine beast, not a group of monsters could trespass, such as the ‘Flood’. Balmel is one of the most important borders with the Sacred Place to many countries. So, geographically, Balmel becomes an important defensive position between the Sacred Place and to each country. However, in recent years, the scale of the ‘Flood’, which can be used for training, hasn’t occurred, and it means that the skill level of soldiers showed a slight drop. The star of the battles are the Chosen Ones, but it’s the common soldiers that occupy most of the battlefield. There’s no loss to raise the strength of the whole battle force, no matter how little. It’s rare, so let’s put it to good use. Schnee will come too, right?”

“Yes, she should have gone to meet the feudal lord now.”

“Then please contact Schnee too. I’ll take care of the small necessary arrangements.”

“Do you make the arrangements with the guild and the army?”

“Yes, since I am the assistant manager of Golden Company. In addition, the feared ‘worst case scenario’ won’t happen now since Shin-sama is here.

He seemed to have connections with the top brass of the army and the guild. Shin also knew that Golden Company was of a large-scale, so he was not surprised that that was the case.

“Would it be okay for you to make such a decision on your own for a company?”

“The merchant sometimes has stronger power than a king. Because Golden Company has a different status from trading companies, which can be found here and there, my own decision too, is not treated as the decision of a common merchant. I also have experience participating in a defensive war; that will play a part in this decision. When there were too many peaceful days, it slacks off in various ways. That may become fatal to Balmel. Fortunately, I get along well with the person commanding the army, and added to the fact that Schnee will join there, the preparation won’t be so necessary too——If this city falls though, there is also the trouble regarding the circulation of goods..”

“Oi, your true intentions just leaked out a little..”

If one thought of stories with persuasive power, this was one of them.

To Berett, who leaked lines that were significant to merchants, it made Shin lose strength.

“It’s because a vast quantity of material will arrive after the ‘Flood’. It’s an opportunity to replenish stock cheaply.”

“To discover this as soon as the safety of Balmel is ensured, huh?…”

Where did the elf who lived in the forest go to? Berett was a money loving character; at the same time, Shin recalled that now.

“Hearing profit talk anywhere, that’s called a merchant. I had a novel idea in various ways with players this way. In the last decade of doing that in the shadows, sales are skyrocketing.”

“Heh, what kind is it, for instance?”

“It’s the featured product ‘Toilet Set’ of course. I had a hard time reproducing the inner shape and the flow of the water. Though the function necessary to make it a ‘wasslet’ cannot be reproduced yet, I’ll make it come true someday.”

“The name is slightly different though. Or rather, was it you who made that?”

Shin was often surprised when he came to this world, but he was most surprised by the toilet in the sense of unlikelihood. He thought that was a thing that was very close to the real world, but it appeared to have been made in the image of the real thing.

“That reminds me, it was also in Tsuki no Hokora. I have completely forgotten because it was something I used ordinarily.”

There was a toilet in his home. It was a natural thing to have in the real world.

And, even if this world looked like a game, it was real.

Therefore, in the situation where Shin did his business normally in Tsuki no Hokora, he hardly remembered any sense of discomfort.

“I mean when was that toilet placed in there? Though it is there now, Tsuki no Hokora never had such a thing.”

“I got permission from Schnee because it can be said it is a necessity when it comes to living in real life.”

“Indeed. It was also in the inn where I stayed; is it fairly widespread now?”

“Though we haven’t yet reached one in every household, it’s not strange to find one in some big inn or so. The first regular customers were the royal family and the nobles. They have to show off in a variety of trivial places after all. Because our toilet also has the practicality, we have received a considerable sum from the optional charges.”

They also seemed to sell custom-made toilets. It was clever salesmanship.

“Now that I’m aware of that, I cannot return to the same life in the past anymore.”

“Uwaa, your smile is evil, Berett.”

When only the words were heard, he seemed to be in the ‘sell some dangerous medicine’ mood. Was the situation before the ‘Toilet Set’ installation severe to that extent?

“Will the other followers become so dark too?”

To Berett’s appearance, Shin became worried a little.

◆◆◆◆

“Then, I’ll be counting on you.”

“Leave it to me. I’m looking forward to our next business.”

Turning his back on Berett, who neatly bowed, Shin went to the guild.

Schnee had been contacted and was asked to cooperate with Berett. The rest also asked for a little request.

When he arrived at the guild with the help of the map, a lot of adventurers had already gathered.

There were various people who were recruiting for impromptu parties, people who were not absorbed in information gathering, and people who withdrew money that had been deposited in the guild to maintain their weapons.

Shin, who placed the young fox on his head, appeared to attract the attention of the surrounding adventurers for a moment, but they returned to work as if having lost interest before long. Looking at the circumstances, Shin expected that the information that the 'Flood' was happening had been announced.

"Excuse me, I'd like to ask a few questions."

"Yes, how may I help you?"

At the timing he aimed for when there were few people around, Shin headed toward the receptionist.

The one at the receptionist desk was Eliza, who had called the guild master last time.

At the other side of the rectangular lens, light blue eyes stared at Shin. She was a professional at her job, as she didn't direct her gaze at Yuzuha either.

"Are there any records of the past 'Flood's?"

"Past 'Flood's?"

"Yes, since it is my first experience, I want to gather more information. Also, may I hear what kind of role of the adventurers have in the 'Flood'?"

There seemed to be very few people examining the past records of the 'Flood'; he was permitted immediately on the condition that he had to examine them inside the library.

Shin stood next to Eliza who guided him through the guild. Yuzuha was Shin's contract beast, so it was fine for it to accompany him.

"You were talking about the role of adventurers a short while ago, right?"

"Yes. Personally, I was thinking that they were placed like a reserve force of the army or for search and destroy missions."

Shin talked about his expectations to Eliza, who seemed to be going to explain along the way.

"You are not wrong with that; it's reckless to tell adventurers to take organized actions like the army. Though it's possible if several parties gathered and work together, it couldn't be compared with the army. Therefore, their main job is to crush enemies who runs out of the protruding groups."

"Well, that's appropriate."

A standard adventurer's party consisted of six people. However, it didn't mean there was an upper limit to the amount of members.

An irregular party such as a duo or a group of three was not unusual, there were many of those who increased their members only when on a large-scale like this time. There would be a significant different combination of skill levels, and they couldn't be incorporated into the army.

The contents of which Eliza spoke, it was natural to say it was appropriate.

"But upper class Chosen Ones like Shin-sama and the others are different."

Eliza said, as they arrived at the reference library, even though the door was closed.

No one was in the reference library. Because it was only limited to humans among the adventurers who knew about the Chosen Ones, it was probably taken into consideration.

“A little while ago, the report from Feudal Lord-sama has arrived. The person who accompanied you is from the royal family of Bayreuth Kingdom, right?”

“Indeed. As for why we came to such a place, please don’t ask me. The one who saw the ‘Flood’ and told me to hurry up was her.”

“We do not intend to inquire any further. But let’s get back to the story, the Chosen Ones are the vanguards that cut through the ‘Flood’. Although to be exact, it is the magic skills of the Chosen Ones.”

It was probably the Chosen Ones who could use wide area magic that he heard about from Rionne’s talk.

“As for the group distribution, the first group will consist of four people: Shin-sama, Hibineko-sama, Holly-sama, and Shadow-sama. The second group will be Schnee-sama, Rionne-sama, Guile-sama, and Liege-sama. The number of enemies will be reduced by the magic of Schnee-sama and Guile-sama, and at the same time the battle starts, the army will annihilate the remaining enemies. But it’s said that the number of enemies is quite large, so the first group will charge at the enemy, who are outside the range of the magic, and will have to hold this place down. After the use of the magic, Schnee-sama thins it out by killing the big boss, and Rionne-sama together with Liege-sama become the guards for Guile-sama. After the first group also has reduced the number moderately, they will retreat and have the army take the front over.”

Eliza explained the strategy plainly. It seemed a detailed plan had already been made.

Guile and Liege were probably the names of the other Chosen Ones.

“There is a fairly large battle force this time, but how has it always been done?”

“It depends on the Chosen Ones who come at that time. When there is a person who can use wide area magic, it becomes a pattern similar to this time. But, there is almost no difference because it is included in an agreement that one person is always there.”

"Is that so?"

Because reducing the number was required, a magic skill user would be useful.

In case of the Chosen One's magic skill, the wider the range of a spell, the lower the power becomes, but it could be covered with the height of the stats. It should be enough if the opponents are low-level monsters.

"By the way Eliza-san, will it be okay for you to leave the reception desk?"

"No problem. The staff and the residents should know what to do. Besides the inexperienced person being in a hurry, we have surprisingly little work."

As expected, the city continued standing off against the 'Flood'.

Then, once the talk was over, Shin reached out his hand to a document.

While reading the documents of the past 'Flood', he asked Eliza about the strategy taken and the movement of the enemy at that time, and thought over whether there was any regularity.

"Occasionally, strong individuals seem to appear, right?"

Shin, who looked at the document, suddenly spoke out what was on his mind.

Low-level monsters spawned in large amounts during the 'Flood', but it seemed that individuals who reached level 300 were confirmed several times.

He understood that the appearance rate was higher in the 'Flood' of a larger scale.

Because the number was two or three at most, ordinary level soldiers were able to deal with it if their concentration level was raised on a long-distance attack.

"The monsters of the 'Flood' are too crowded, there seems to be the possibility of them killing each other by mistake. As a result, some of them have leveled up and evolved."

There were also relationships of friend and foe, as well as allies between monsters, in THE NEW GATE.

Depending on the situation, the case of a player getting caught up in the battle between monsters had happened. Though it didn't happen frequently, because many items and experience point were obtained with less damage if one acted skillfully, many players utilized it.

"If that's the case, it may happen this time, can it not?"

"The possibility is high. Speaking of this time, I think it's unnecessary to worry."

Was this because the news of Schnee had circulated? There was no uneasiness on Eliza's face.

"Now then, shall we return soon?"

"You have enough already?"

"I have read most of the noticeable ones, and I have plans for the evening."

When Shin and Eliza returned to the hall of the guild, the amount of people had decreased considerably. Was it because the time was approaching evening? They were probably having a meal.

He thanked Eliza and exited the guild. He intended to help with the preparations if he had time, but reading the documents had unexpectedly taken time.

"...This message is, Tiera huh?"

Because a message had arrived, he looked around and opened it while walking slowly on the edge of the street.

The contents were about tonight's inn. With the name of the inn, such things as whereabout, which area were written. Though it was simple, a map was also drawn, if Shin used that map, he wouldn't get lost.

"(I'm hungry...)"

“That’s right. Shall we go to the inn and have a meal?”

After he replied like he was speaking to himself, Shin then headed to the inn.

After about 20 minutes of walking, a signboard, upon which a red tailed fox was drawn, was seen.

The name of the inn was “Red Tail”. By the way, it was also the name of an existing monster, and Yuzuha’s follower.

When he opened the door of the shop, a bell rang “clang clang”.

“Welcome! Will it be one person?”

“I think my companions will also come.”

One lady came out from the counter hearing the bell sound.

With ears above her head, and from the tail seen behind the long skirt, she was a beast without a doubt. They were vivid red as the name of the shop suggested. Though it was simple, she was probably a Type Fox beast.

“May I ask for your name?”

“I’m Shin. This is my partner, Yuzuha.”

The lady with the appearance of a beautiful woman at blooming age, seemed to remember something when hearing the word companions from Shin. She nodded as having convinced that Shin’s name was heard, and opened the register inside the counter.

“The name of your companion, please.”

“Tiera Lucent.”

“Thank you. Your companion is already rested in her room. This is customer-sama’s room key. The location of the room is go up the stair and go right side of room 205. Your companion is in room 206 right next to that. Breakfast is until 9 bell sounds in the morning, as for dinner, I’ll serve until it’s 9 o’clock on that clock there.”

Shin looked at the direction where the lady pointed out. A clock with a diameter of about 50 cemels was installed there, and was ticking away quietly.

"There are clocks, huh?"

Clocks weren't widely used in this world. The church bell was in the area where nobles live. People acted using that as a guideline. The ones who worried about time, were merchants and government officials who had the motto "time is money".

"Does it ring at fixed times?"

"Customer-sama is pretty knowledgeable. That clock produces a ringing sound once every hour."

It didn't seem to be the style where it rang one time at 1 o'clock, and two times at 2 o'clock.

The needle on the clock already pointed at nearly 6 o'clock.

"For the time being, I think I'm going to eat after I go to my room."

"Understood."

As Shin was seen off by the lady, he went up to the second floor.

The room 205 was a single person room. The area was about 7 tatami mats and there were a desk and a chair by the window, there was also a bathroom at the entrance sideway. A white clean sheet was laid out on the bed, and looked comfortable too.

"Tiera, you there?"

Shin who checked the room briefly went out to the corridor at once, and knocked the door of the next room where Tiera was at.

"Shin?"

After a short while, a voice was heard from the other side of the door.

"Yeah, have you had dinner?"

"No, not yet."

“Then, shall we eat together? Yuzuha also looks hungry.”

“Kuu…”

“That’s terrible, isn’t it? Wait a minute, I’ll go out soon.”

To Yuzuha who raised a cry for feeling hungry, the voice of a bitter smile returned from Tiera.

They waited for a couple dozen seconds. Tiera joined Shin to order dinner in the dining room on the first floor.

Was the stew a standard? An exquisite dish with proper ingredients was served.

Also for some reason, Yuzuha’s was a thick steak which had been grilled carefully. Though Kagerou’s was a steak too, Shin saw that the two steaks were not the same.

Shin had learned the basic【Cooking】from Cook. The【Cooking】skill rose until VI. In this world, it was a level that couldn’t be reached easily.

Therefore, he understood the value of the steak put before Yuzuha. The food grade of the steak was obviously above the ones before Shin and Kagerou, Yuzuha repeatedly revealed its joy through telepathy since a while ago.

“Um, this is?”

“Somehow, we feel like we must serve to customer’s contract beast our finest cuisine of our shop. Naturally, the price stays as it is.”

The lady also had a look that said ‘I don’t know why I feel such a way’ on her face.

(This is because Yuzuha is an Element Tail, right?)

Element Tail was not only a fox type monster, it should be worshiped by the people of Type Fox beasts as well, Shin remembered. For them, it was possible to say it was an existence on same level as a God. Even if the true identity of Yuzuha was not understood, it may have had an effect on her somewhere.

Since there was no reason to refuse, they decided to receive it gratefully.

Did Kagerou also realize that Yuzuha had a higher rank too? He seemed to have no complaints.

“I wonder what it was.”

“Free of charge she said, isn’t it good? This stew is delicious!”

“I have no complaints since I prefer this rather than meat.”

While watching the meat juices of the steak Yuzuha had dripping, Tiera also slowly put the stew into her mouth.

“Yeah, it’s delicious!”

After they finished eating, Shin left Yuzuha to Tiera and left the inn for a moment.

He crossed over the rampart while hiding himself with a skill, and entered the woods where the trees were dense. When he neared the center, he cut down trees with wind magic, and created an open space.

“Release!”

A pendant shone, and Tsuki no Hokora appeared.

This luminous phenomenon had already been concealed with magic too.

He then entered the shop and went straight to the forge.

“Well, shall I do this?”

Fire was ignited in the furnace, and he materialized the equipment he took from Shadow and the others.

By looking at the weapons which he lined up, he contemplated for a short while in what way to strengthen them. While making a list of the materials in his brain, first, he picked up Shadow’s dagger from the weapons. The hilt was removed and he poured magic into the blade.

“The durability value has somewhat dropped, but it is well matched to its owner’s magic. It’s as I expected.”

When he confirmed the state of the dagger, Shin took out an orichalcum and a scarletite ingot each from Item Box, and threw them into the furnace.

It didn’t take much time, a metal was produced from the mix of silver and red. The metal formed was called chimeradite. Because it was a synthesis of two kinds, its performance became a low-class among chimeradite. However, the quality of the metal was higher than orichalcum and scarletite alone.

“Let’s do this.”

While Shin poured magic into the chimeradite, he thrusted the dagger’s blade into the ingot. The chimeradite like clay swallowed the blade, and when the blade was completely buried inside the ingot, Shin placed that on the anvil.

“………”

He focused his mind, and hammered the ingot with a mallet to distribute the magic power. Each time the ingot changed shape, it became smaller as it was compressed. If there were other blacksmiths in this place, the view would make their eyes widen in amazement.

After a few minutes, the black bladed knife with silver and red mixed in was completed on the anvil. The hilt and the clasp which were taken apart were reattached again. Though the length and the weight of the dagger hadn’t changed, the high-density red aura which enveloped the whole dagger proved that it was not a normal item.

Its inscription was “Night Kill’s Dagger” when appraised. As for its grade, the weapon ranked up to《Mythology》grade. Its performance also increased by 80%. In the event when supported by【Enchant】, its performance would be far above the equipment available.

“Well, I guess this is alright.”

He nodded once at the result of the dagger, and then Shin picked up the next weapon.

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"This is the last one!"

Finally with a yell, Shin lowered the mallet. As for Hibineko and Holly's weapons, 『Misty Hound』 and 『Short Stick of the Dawn』, they had been ranked up respectively. The dragon's armor was also reinforced.

About an hour and a half had passed since he began his work. Shin, who felt thirsty, converted the last equipment into a card, put those back into his Item Box and went to the kitchen.

Thereupon, for the first time, he noticed that Schnee was in the living room. He was so focused on blacksmithing, he hadn't noticed her coming in.

When Shin arrived in the living room, Schnee offered the drink which she prepared for Shin. Shin thanked her and accepted it, drinking it in one go.

"Phew, I feel revived."

"Good work for today."

"When did you come?"

"I arrived about 20 minutes ago. Because I can't help you with smithing, I was waiting here."

Schnee didn't train the blacksmithing skill as Shin did. Even in the game era, her skill level was almost at IV.

"How about the feudal lord?"

"Regarding my participating in the war, Berett's plan was adopted. We will reduce the number of monsters, and leave the rest for the training of the army."

"It is just as I heard it."

As he expected, Schnee participation in the war seemed effective.

“...Um, Shin”

“Hm?”

When Shin intended to return to the inn because he finished his business, Schnee called out to him with a hesitant voice.

“Did you hear about ‘that’...from Berett?”

“The story of PKs and players where you were silent?”

“......yes”

To Shin’s words, Schnee answered in a small voice.

Schnee herself probably felt a great sense of guilt for not telling him. His acquaintances who died in the game, if the person close to us is alive, normally we would like to know about that information.

That was concealed intentionally until it came to light by chance. Berett was right, Schnee’s behaviour couldn’t be praised if seen as a support character.

“I heard the circumstances. About your matter, I guess you would mention it after everything had ended, right?”

Shin said in a light tone, so it didn’t become too serious an atmosphere.

After Schnee finished subjugating the PKs, she was supposed to talk about everything to Shin, and wait for the verdict. At the very least, the Schnee whom Shin knew of, was such a character.

“...yes.”

For a support character, to the player that should be called the creator, the thoughts to disobey shouldn’t exist. That also included Schnee. Even though the binding in the game era had disappeared by the fact that it became reality, her defying him was unthinkable.

“Berett said that what you did, was for me. I think I have caused you worry.”

Schnee’s face turned down.

It was not normal. However, Schnee moved on her own. She carried it out against Shin's intention.

"...it's different."

"Different?"

Schnee said it's different. But Shin couldn't think of a good reason other than that.

"It is true, that I don't want Shin to change, by concerning yourself with PKs. But it...it is more of a personal reason for me."

Though it was an action with Shin as the primary concern, it was also for her own sake at the same time.

Her voice gradually began to tremble. The words and thoughts which she had kept held in, were asking for the way out.

"I hated it! To see that kind of Shin, and being looked at with the same eyes that saw me as a tool! I was able to endure it when my ego was weak at that time. But, the me now, undoubtedly can't stand it!"

In a calm and yet strong tone, Schnee vented her feelings.

If the companion was not Shin but someone else, she wouldn't have done this. Otherwise, if only pure loyalty to serve Shin existed inside her heart, she certainly wouldn't have suffered like this.

But that would not happen in reality. Once again, just the thought 'He may become like that', had Schnee unbearably frightened.

"I cannot replace Marino-san. If, if Shin becomes like at that time once more, I cannot stop you, Shin!"

The source of why Shin had changed, and also the reason why he had to return, everything was caused by his girlfriend. In her place, there was no room for anyone else.

Now that Marino wasn't here, he would be beyond cure if he changed. If that was the case, Schnee had no choice but to remove the cause. Even if she understood it was hasty thinking, doing nothing and so on, Schnee was unable to do it.

“Schnee…”

“I am a cowardly woman. Even though I did something like this, I am somewhat glad that Marino isn’t here.”

Schnee stepped back as she said this.

His girlfriend —— If Marino, who was Shin’s only lover, was there, it may be all right for Shin to change. Marino was an important person to that extent for Shin. If put into a ranking, she would finish first by a large margin.

Thus Schnee believed, if the first, Marino, was not there, she herself may be able to be the number one.

“I….I…..”

She suppressed it in front of Shin.

So far, she was able to suppress it. She stopped the thoughts in her mind, and pretended not to see it.

However, once she put it into words, she couldn’t control her feelings anymore. It couldn’t stop overflowing.

Because former players had come to this world, Marino may also have come, too.

If it was Marino, she could probably stop Shin.

However, to look for only one person in this world, how difficult was it? Schnee also understood that much. Even if Marino came here, they wouldn’t meet each other conveniently quickly. In fact, even with Berett and the others from Golden Company’s power, the searchable range and so on were limited.

But it couldn’t be asserted that there was nothing as it was.

This was because he was reunited with many comrades such as former players, Shibaid, Girard, and Schnee, who were completely drawn to Shin. It was possible that even the irregulars where he appeared near Tsuki no Hokora, or the appearance of Demons, and the reencounter with the former players were orchestrated.

It wouldn't be too long before he met Marino. There was something that made her think so.

"………"

Seeing Schnee shed tears, Shin was troubled at what to do.

He never thought Schnee would lose her composure like this.

He came to this world and often saw new things, still Shin's image of Schnee was always calm, graceful, and a little airheaded; she was such a woman.

Even if they had spent time together, his impression didn't change greatly.

However, that was merely Shin's presumption. As for Schnee, the impression of this guy from the game was repeating many times over in her heart. When the foundation was the same, he wasn't able to perceive her heart.

Shin didn't think there was anything wrong with what Schnee had said.

What Schnee said about Shin had changed at that time, he had no way of arguing even if he said he was not sane.

Shin himself knew well how he was in a dangerous state at that time now. It was natural for Schnee to be uneasy.

That she didn't want him to reunite with Marino, also could be understood vaguely.

If you came to like someone, of course you would like to be that person's number one, it was a natural feeling. And, like Schnee, being in dilemma because of her consciences, it was to be expected if she had a heart.

While noticing that Schnee had a liking toward him, it was natural to accept it as 'what goes around, comes around'.

"…Sorry"

"Please do not apologize, Shin. I am, the bad one."

He hated himself for only such a word to come out.

Shin was sorry, when he should have talked properly earlier.

When he met Hibineko and the others again, and heard about the players that had come to this world, Shin also thought about Marino's being.

However, Shin didn't think that Marino would be in this world. Hibineko and the others had their HP become 0 in the game, and died. And, though the reason was unclear, they were transferred to this world with state as is after they died.

As for Marino, her HP certainly became 0 too. However, there was no direct cause of death. Marino's avatar, didn't disappear.

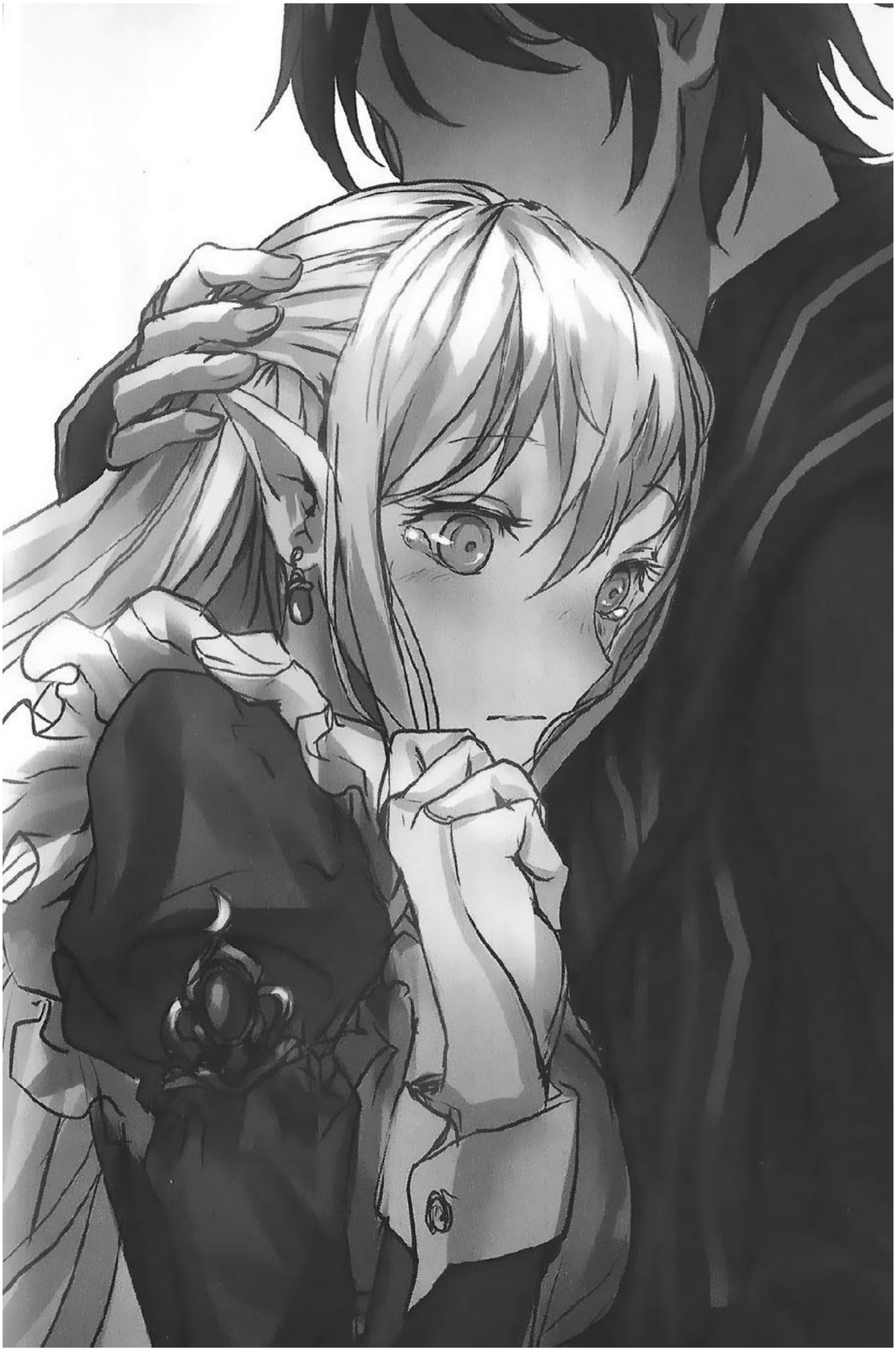
"Schnee…Don't blame yourself too much"

"!!? Eh, um, !…."

Schnee, who was quietly shedding tears, had no time to react, Shin embraced Schnee tightly.

To Shin's abrupt action, Schnee's body stiffened without a sound.

The ugly part of herself had been revealed. For Schnee, who was filled with anxiety, Shin's action was too unexpected.



Even though she was in such a situation, she was ashamed as she was delighted for being embraced tightly, the cheek of the flustered Schnee turned rosy.

“Schnee, I don’t think your behaviour was wrong. Even me, if I knew that you would become like the me of that time, I’m likely to think of doing something and act.”

“But I, to Marino-san…”

“That, I guess there’s no helping it.”

“Such a thing is——”

“It is. When it comes to liking someone, I’d like to be the number one of that person; everyone is the same. That, even if it’s to wish for someone else’s misfortune, surely I cannot help think. Being really in love, it is likely because of that.”

Because he was experienced, he understood it.

There was no reason. Be it Shin, or Schnee, or someone else, there would be no difference.

“To be honest, I was really happy to be able to meet you, Schnee”

“!!”

To Shin’s confession, Schnee’s body trembled a little.

“Just when I thought it was over after I finally beat the boss, I was transferred here. Without any acquaintances, and on top of that, it felt like another person’s house even when I found my home. As a result, I had a strange disposition in herb collection. Therefore, when you said welcome back at that time, I was so relieved. That you still remembered me, Schnee.”

“……”

“Though Berett mentioned about you being an unworthy follower or something, I don’t have the intention of punishing you if I have nothing to blame you for.”

“But that…”

“I don’t hear anything. I’ve already decided, a high decision. Objection is unacceptable.”

Shin forcibly shut up Schnee who still tried to say something.

Nothing good would result in dragging out and prolonging such a thing.

"And no more secrets."

"…yes"

The hug was released. Shin was inwardly relieved as there was no gloom on Schnee's face until some time ago.

"Um, Shin. May I ask you one question?"

"What is it?"

"About Marino-san, do you…still love her?"

"…Yes, I love her. This feeling hasn't changed even now."

"I..see. I understand."

Hearing Shin's answer, Schnee has an expression like she had made up her mind.

The next moment, when Shin had a question regarding that change, Schnee jumped forward lightly without spare movement.

"!!?"

Schnee's lips touched Shin's lips for a moment.

Schnee took action as if it was the revenge for a little while ago, and Shin wasn't able to react this time.

Even if he understood what happened, he didn't know why it had become so.

"Because I'm not giving up."

With a bright red face, Schnee said so.

"I-I love you, Shin. I understand that there is a reason for you to return to your former world, but still, these are my true feelings!!"

She was quite embarrassed. With the momentum like being somewhat desperate, Schnee spoke of what she felt.

At those direct words, Shin also felt his face flushing.

"…I-I will leave first."

"Ah…"

Shin didn't have the time to stop her, as Schnee rushed outside in the blink of an eye.

Speaking of Shin who was left hanging, he could only freeze while stretching out his arm.

"That…that wasn't expected…"

What kind of face should he make when they met after this? Shin racked his brain.

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Soon after Schnee had left, since he couldn't just remain there forever, Shin left and stored Tsuki no Hokora.

The night wind chilled the small traces of passion that still lingered.

"…First, should I head back?"

After climbing the rampart with【Hiding】, he went back inside the castle without being noticed by anyone.

As he went back to the inn, he bought a light snack at a street stall and sat on an empty bench.

Information regarding the 'Flood' seemed to have spread well already, as he noticed people that appeared to be preparing for the war here and there. There was no sense of urgency. Was it because they had experienced the 'Flood' several times before?

"Ara? Shin-kun?"

While he was watching the pedestrian traffic, he was suddenly called out to. When Shin turned around, Holly was walking toward him with Shadow right behind her.

"Are you heading back now?"

"Yes, and I'm going shopping while I'm at it. What are you doing in a place like this, Shin-kun?"

"I finished the weapon reinforcement, and I'm a bit hungry now."

Shin had met them at just the right time, and since he had already finished, he gave the two back the weapons he had strengthened.

Holly was pleased with the result, while Shadow stiffened in surprise.

"Reinforcement can't result in this kind of level."

"Don't worry about trivial things. Shin-kun did his best, so I've also decided to *whack* in the battle."

"…Right. I'll use them gratefully."

Shadow nodded in agreement to Holly, who was positive wherever she went.

As there was still time to spare before the war, they also had enough time to practice with their weapons.

"I'd like to ask you something, is it okay?"

"What do you want to ask?"

"It's about your daughter."

When he had used【Analyze】on Kaede, there had been a small static interference running through the race indication.

According to what he had heard from Schnee, it was likely that the interference occurred when the child was a person of mixed parentage.

"Do-Don't tell me Shin-kun, that you would even take a beautiful child away, even though it's our Kaede?!"

"WHAT?!"

"Wait a-what is with that manga-like reaction? Shadow-san, please don't take Holly's joke seriously!"

While Holly's joke could be called clichéd, Shadow emitted a dangerous aura.

Shin had intended to have a serious talk, but it had lost its tension almost immediately.

“Good grief, please keep the joking within bounds…”

“But you brought up Kaede so suddenly. I don’t think I should be saying something like this as a parent, but it’s popular phrase, is it not?”

“Indeed.”

Shadow agreed with Holly’s remark. They seemed to have acquired the title of “doting parents” after having a daughter.

“For now, let’s leave the joking aside. What I want to ask is, what…is Kaede-chan??”

When Shin said this, the two changed completely from their playful mood immediately.

“If possible, let’s talk about this at a place with no one around.”

“Well, it isn’t a story that I would like to tell people much.”

“I don’t mind. That was my intention from the beginning.”

Shin didn’t intend to keep talking there, so they moved to a better place like the two had suggested.

They went to the bar ‘Nyan Da Land,’ which was located next to the cafe ‘B&W’.

“For the three of you to gather at a time like this, did something happen?”

“I want to borrow the back room…it’s about our daughter.”

Shadow said a few words to Hibineko and borrowed a private room in the back. With that last remark, Hibineko had understood what Shadow wanted to talk about.

“What do you want to drink?”

“I’ll take whatever you recommend.”

When they entered the private room, Shadow and Holly sat across from Shin with a serious posture.

Naturally, Shin too corrected his posture.

"Getting straight to the point, Shin, how much do you know about Halfs?"

"Based on what I heard from Schnee, it's a child that has either inherited the special characteristics of both parents, or inherited neither of them. There's also the kind that has almost no changes from one parent."

"There's no mistake in what you know. Also, if anything, the first one is often called *critical*, and the second one is called *fumble*."

"Aren't those gambling terms?"

"Once, there was a group of people who tried to give birth to Halfs intentionally. The names they used back then seem to have remained. It isn't just the names that are from gambling, the probability involving it should be called gambling too."

The probability of a person with mixed parentage being born was extremely low. The ones that were called *critical* had even lower chances.

Almost all of the ones born were born as ordinary children that were "Halfs" in name only. It's something that no one was able to predict the outcome of.

"It's a fact that a *critical* is quite superior in terms of fighting power, you know?"

"What happens specifically?"

"Fumu, though there are a lot of individual variations, the child can use the two different race's native skills and bonuses. There is a famous beast that can remain in【Beast Form】while using the dragnil's【Breath】, and a lord that can use both【Devil Eyes】and the elves'【Soul Technique】simultaneously."

"What's with that cheat?"

Shin, after hearing about the ability of the *criticals*, said unintentionally.

Each of the seven races that existed in this world had their own abilities which could be called unique skills and bonuses.

Things like the humans' high magic resistance, the beasts' bestial form, and the elves' soul techniques were examples of the unique skills that each race had.

How was it not a cheat to have more than one of them?

Shin wasn't in a position to say anything, but even he couldn't use the unique skills and bonuses of other races.

In this world in which the existence of individuals became reality, there would be individuals who is Halfs.

"By the way, our Kaede-chan is a *critical*, you know?"

"Seriously?"

"She can use both【Soul Technique】and【Devil Eyes】. I don't know if it's because she's a *critical*, but her stats also average out at around 400."

"I thought so. Isn't that just a natural cheat?"

From the viewpoint of a commoner, a *critical* was an existence that could make fun of even the upper class Chosen Ones.

"So please don't spread it in the public, okay?"

"I won't. Come to think of it, if she is that strong, why wasn't she chosen as one of the front-line members?"

"The coming of age for elves is 20 years old. I can't send a minor off to the battlefield. Because it's certain that she will become part of the battle force, she will be placed in the reserves in case of an emergency."

This time, since Shin was around, Kaede didn't have to participate in the war and could remain on standby in the castle.

The reason for this was because she was too young and inexperienced in controlling her power on the battlefield during the last 'Flood'. But, as a result of Shadow and Holly's continued training, there would no longer be any problem even if she was counted as part of the fighting power now.

“By the way, Shin, I have a question, is it okay with you?”

“I don’t mind. What do you want to ask?”

“What did you do after ‘that’, Shin?”

To Shin, who was thinking about what kind of question was coming, Shadow’s question was quite unexpected.

Certainly, because time had been limited earlier, he didn’t get to tell Shadow and the others.

“Right, not much changed as for what I did. I was hunting PKs every day. But, after ‘that,’ there was a small incident. I was going to return to dungeon capturing, but——”

As for that incident, it was also something that was related to Marino.

Without it, Shin wouldn’t be here today.

Shadow listened to Shin’s story without saying anything. His expression was somewhat melancholic.

“——that’s why I crushed the big PK guilds first, before setting out on a quest and dungeon assault. Because the last boss was a solo-type, I somehow managed to defeat it.”

“I see. No matter how powerful it is, if it’s a solo-type, you can defeat it.”

Shadow, who had finished hearing the story looked amazed.

The fact that Shin had defeated the last monster Origin all by himself, even if it wasn’t reckless, it was absurd.

You could say the premise of MMOs was to cooperate with other people. Though there were also active solo players, most gained the social disposition of either forming a party with somebody or entering a guild.

Above all, party cooperation was essential, as the real thrill of adventure was in killing the boss. Basically, a boss monster wasn’t an opponent that could be challenged solo.

Parties formed, cooperated, and backed each other up to win against monsters that couldn't be defeated by a single person.

Among the high-level boss monsters in THE NEW GATE, bosses who could be defeated by a single person were called solo-type, and bosses who could only be defeated by a party were called raid-type.

Though Origin, which Shin fought at the end, was a solo-type, it had originally been a raid-type boss.

"That's because I did every kind of reinforcement I could think of: foods, items, equipment and so forth. One might say that if the opponent was a raid-type, I would normally lose."

Even if it was Shin, if the opponent monster was impossible to be conquered without a party, he wouldn't think of challenging it solo. He would only challenge it if he knew that the opponent was a solo-type.

As for a solo-type, even if it was a boss, from the size and the attack method and so on, defeating it was possible depending on the luck, equipment, skills, and level of the player alone. Of course, it goes without saying that normally, even if a player was defeated, they still had the choice to return.

The winning rate wasn't always 100% even if Shin fought against a monster of the same solo-type more than once.

On the other hand, raid-types were different from solo-types. Their bodies were enormous, and they had many places that had to be attacked at the same time.

Shin's partner Yuzuha, also known as an 'Element Tail', was a raid-type boss. Though it was different for Shin now, he didn't know whether he could have won once in 100 rounds against one as a solo player or not in the game era. Even then, it would have taken an extreme amount of luck.

If you only thought about hunting down a raid-type 'Element Tail' regardless of the resulting sacrifices, you could understand just how strong it was just by saying that you would have needed at least three members of Rokuten, who were of the stat-capped class.

“I wonder why was it a solo-type.”

Shin said after remembering his fight with Origin. He thought that a raid-type of the highest difficulty would be waiting as the final boss. If the monster was at least ‘Element Tail’-level, it would have been almost impossible to clear.

Shadow shook his head calmly.

“Maybe it was intended to be cleared, or was deemed sufficient? Either way, if many people were saved, that would be fine, I suppose.”

“You’re right. That reminds me, I also wanted to ask you something else. How did Shadow-san come here? From Holly-san’s story, you don’t seem to have initially arrived here together.”

Though it was unimaginable for the present Shadow, the Shadow, when he and Shin had acted together, had been an assassin through and through.

Shin remembered Shadow crying while he disappeared after he and Holly's enemy had killed each other at the same time.

“Oh well, as for coming here, I seem to have arrived earlier. I was surprised when I met Shadow again.”

“That’s my line!”

One couldn’t imagine the ghastly figure he had been in the past after seeing the Shadow who talked with Holly while smiling.

“I found this man in a village I was dispatched to at the request of the guild. I heard him fighting the group of monsters that had attacked the village, so I chased after him in a hurry.”

“I am indebted to that village in a lot of ways. Because the monsters had no special features aside from their numbers, I was able to stop them.”

“NO! You weren’t able to stop them. The people of the village were panicking.”

“Now, now, Holly-san. Shadow-san wouldn’t go without knowing the probability of success either.”

Shin calmed down Holly, who began to get angry after remembering those times.

Shadow was an assassin of a higher job class, a ‘Shinobi’. Moreover, his average stats were more than 600. Though he didn’t remodel his equipment randomly like Shin had, if he used the equipment he possessed, which were above the《Legend》grade, he could wipe out some of the tougher monsters instantly.

“Sigh, so I was looking for Shadow in a hurry, and when I found him, he was turning mountains of monster corpses into cards. The other adventurers were stunned. Because they were A ranked, they were somehow convinced of the explanation that he was a Chosen One.”

“After that, I went to visit several places together with Holly. Along the way, I received a report from Gold Company, and met Hibineko again here.”

Berett’s messenger, who was searching for former players, seemed to have had contacted him.

As Shadow and Holly had been associated with Shin in the game, they seemed to have judged that there would be no danger even if they came into contact. If it was only Shadow, they may have had chosen to wait.

“After this and that, I decided to open a shop here.”

Both of them had their cooking skill at level VII, so their business seemed to be thriving.

They also seemed to partnering up with Hibineko’s shop, and both issued coupons that could be used at each other’s shops.

“Come to think of it, how much time has passed since Holly-san came here? You said a while ago that there was a difference between when the two of you arrived.”

Shin suddenly spoke what came to his mind.

There was a time lag of approximately one month between Holly and Shadow’s deaths. Shin thought about in what way it influenced the time they arrived here.

“I’ve been here for 30 years as of this year”

“As for me, I came here about 10 years after Holly.”

“If that’s the case, is it about 10 years per month?”

“But the person who had almost the same time of death as me came here more than a decade before me. This seems to be different for each individual. Some came here more than 100 years ago, and there are people who have already reached the end of their life span, too.”

Though Shin had calculated the approximate conversion from their story, his hypothesis was denied by Holly. By the way, it had been about 40 years since Hibineko had arrived here.

“Shin, do you think Marino-chan will come here?”

“Holly!”

Shin stopped Shadow, who tried to scold Holly.

“It’s okay…To be honest, it’s a fifty-fifty; I feel like I want her to be here, but I also feel like I don’t. Of course, I want to meet her again, but then I would completely lose my intention to return to the former world.”

There were many things that Shin had left behind in the real world.

His parents who had raised him, his brother and sister, his close friends; the list could go on forever.

Even though he had no relatives in this world, he wasn’t terribly unhappy.

Still, although he had come to this world that looked just like the game, the real world was not something so unimportant for Shin that he could discard it easily.

Therefore, if there was a scale between the choices of ‘Stay’ or ‘Return’, he still inclined toward ‘Return’ for now.

He must pass on the messages entrusted to him by the people who had died in the death game to their bereaved families; it was a promise he must fulfil if he returned to the real world.

But, as he spent time in this world, the scales in Shin slowly, but surely, moved. They were slowly moving away from the choice to “Return”.

There were so many charms in this world. He had overwhelming power that separated him from others, Schnee, who loved him, and former Rokuten followers who still showed him loyalty.

Even if the dangerous living conditions were extremely different from the real world, it was not a great threat to Shin.

He desired to travel freely around the world that had undergone a great change; it would be a lie if he denied that.

In addition, it was possible to reunite with the players who had died—— the more he spent time in this world, the number the bonds he had with its inhabitants increased.

If he found out that Marino was here, the scale would probably sway greatly to one side.

“Well, in the first place, there’s also the problem of whether I can return or not.”

“You’re right. But you were able to come here, so there must be a method, no?”

“As I expected, the gate of the dungeon is the matter of concern. Although it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ll have to pass through it again, it’s possible that you’d be able to return if you find yourself in a similar scenario.”

The two people replied seriously to Shin’s words.

From the contents of their discussion, they seemed to agree that Shin should return to the original world.

"There are stories that the Ley Lines may be related to it, but it's still not enough information. From now on, I'll go around looking up more information here and there." (T/N: changed Earth Pulse to Ley Line)
"Let us help when possible."

"I won't be reserved then."

Shadow and Holly expressed a gentle smile.

Afterwards, Shin left the shop after hearing the tales about the two, the countries they had been to, and so forth.

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"Shin has left."

"Yes, though we met again, Shin has completely returned to his former self."

After Shin left the shop, Shadow answered Hibineko, who put away the glasses as he spoke, with a look that seemed somehow relieved.

"Was he that terrible?"

"Yes, though it's not my place to say, all I can say is that he has changed. It's because in the past he had no hesitation to cut down a person."

"I also heard the stories…he didn't seem like someone who would do something like that."

Among the three people, only Shadow had known the desolate Shin. Hibineko and Holly, on the other hand, could not imagine that Shin wouldn't have hesitated to murder like Shadow had said.

"Honestly speaking, I'm surprised, too. The last time I saw Shin, he would never have laughed with such an expression."

When he didn't show his power, Shin currently looked like an ordinary young man who could be found anywhere.

He had retorted to Hibineko's and Holly's way of calling him, and was surprised when he had heard that Shadow and Holly had a child.

That was a natural reaction.

However, he didn't have such a natural reaction before. The Shin whom Shadow had seen at that time had hardly ever changed his expression. Even when he had killed PKs, even if he had eaten delicious food, even if the player who had assisted him had died in front of him.

He had searched and killed PKs just like an assembly-line operation. If one were to say that he was a machine of that kind of purpose, one might understand how dangerous he truly had been.

Had this person changed before coming here only by chance? This was merely what Shadow believed.

"Did something happen?"

"I'm not sure, but there something certainly might have. Something that pulled Shin here."

The three people could only guess. However, it was a good thing, or at least, they understood it to be a good thing. It also concerned the woman whom Shin loved.

"...Marino-chan, will you come here?"

"I wonder. According to the story we heard from Shin, her circumstances seemed slightly different from ours."

The two people didn't know the main reason behind why they had arrived here, except that it had to do with their death in the game, so their question couldn't be concluded.

"...If Mari-nyaa-san isn't here, what would the two of you want Shin to do?"

Hibineko asked Shadow and Holly while skillfully wiping the table with his short paw.

"I guess he should return."

“Agreed, I think so too.”

The two people answered the casual question with the same response.

To the reply without hesitation, Hibineko stopped wiping the table. Because there were only three people in the shop at the moment, they could afford to talk a little.

“Fumu, from our viewpoint, I think he should return if possible.”

“Why the hurry?”

“For now, Shin still wants to return to the other side. But, will he be able to make the same choice after he has spent a long time here?”

If Hibineko had came to this world without much company, he would probably have been able to return without hesitation.

However, Hibineko had already spent more than 40 years in this world. Even if he could return to the original world with Shin, he would no longer choose too.

“If he didn’t have much longer to live in real world like we do, then the choice to spend the rest of his time here is not bad even if it possible for him to return. But Shin is still young. I don’t think I want him to remain in this world where the end is unknown.”

“You’re right. If he had been here for a long time, he would likely not want to go home.”

“But unlike us, Shin is not dead. There should be something he left behind, right?”

“Still, you can also say that, unlike us, Shin is the strongest in this world. Besides, I wonder if he’ll be able to turn down the love of a woman as beautiful as Schnee.”

The current age was called the ‘stress society’. People wanted to be bound by no one, and do whatever they wanted. But at the same time, as people who lived in the real world, they also had to consider everyone else’s feelings. There were many people who wished to live while doing the things they liked and forgetting the unpleasant things.

“This world is indeed really convenient for Shin.”

Shadow and Holly couldn’t deny Hibineko’s words because what he had said also applied to themselves.

“In the end, it depends on Shin, huh?”

“Indeed. Personally, I want his parents to feel relieved.”

“It’s because he carried everyone’s expectations all by himself. I wonder how things will turn out if Mari-nyaa isn’t here.”

Since the beginning of the death game, the three knew that various unreasonable things had been forced upon Shin; they recalled Shin had suppressed himself because of that power at that time. His stats had been high by chance, but because of that, he had been forced to clear the game. It couldn’t be helped that Shin had laughed with a tired look on his face.

It might have ended up differently if everyone had begun from the same starting line. However, with the exception of Shin, the best stats of the advanced players had only just began to exceed 800 in those days. Shin’s stats was about 200 points above theirs.

200 ability differences in THE NEW GATE would only cause other players to become a hindrance to Shin, even if he made a party. The difference in damage dealt, movement speed, defense, and so on was obvious. Only a small number of players reached advanced levels in the first place.

The story was different when he fought against big armies of monsters and cooperated with multiple parties, but there was not enough space for many players to fight together in dungeons. This had especially been true in the last dungeon.

In addition, in the situation where it wasn’t possible to revive after death, it would take over a year to train other players to Shin’s level. The players who had wanted to log out as soon as possible had ganged up and demanded that Shin quickly cleared the game.

“I hope we can be of help to him in the case of an emergency.”

“It’s frustrating, right?”

They couldn’t do anything for the young man who had fought the death game in solitude.

The adults were worried.

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“Now then, shall I return to the inn soon?”

Shin, who had left ‘Nyan Da Land’, muttered and headed toward the inn.

Although his talk with Shadow and the others had diverted his mind to some extent, he still didn’t know what he would do when he met Schnee.

He opened the door of the ‘Red Tail’ while feeling a little depressed, received the key, went to his room without meeting anyone on the way, and arrived at his room.

A short time later, someone knocked on his room door. When he had received the key earlier, he had also asked for water. He then received a bucket of water from a woman. The bucket looked heavy, but the woman had carried it with ease.

He soaked a towel after using magic to warm the water, and wiped down his body. Toilets were becoming popular, but baths still seemed to be difficult to reproduce. Shin, who didn’t understand the technical side of things, couldn't do anything but hope it was built quickly.

“...I should sleep.”

He had nothing else to do in particular, so he decided to go to sleep.

Did the matter with Schnee have a lasting effect on him? He wasn’t able to bring himself to do anything.

He crawled into the futon. Shin’s consciousness faded into sleep unexpectedly smoothly.

Chapter 2

The next day at dawn.

After Shin had finished preparing by outfitting himself, someone knocked on the door. Schnee, who was in disguise, Tiera, Yuzuha, and Kagerou were waiting outside. It seemed like they wanted to have breakfast together.

Shin went downstairs with Yuzuha on his head. Though he casually looked in Schnee's direction, he didn't see anything unusual about her appearance.

"What will you do today?"

Tiera asked while eating breakfast.

It seemed that the 'Flood' had already been widely announced, as the residents' evacuation had started.

Although adventurers had been recruited to help out at places where help was needed, there was not much work left to be done.

"I'll go to the feudal lord's castle. Because I have said that I'd bring you there, please come with me today, Shin."

"Ah-Yeah, I understand."

Had she forgotten to tell him yesterday? Since Shin hadn't thought about his plans for today either, he agreed.

When he looked at Schnee, whose attitude hadn't changed, Shin thought, 'Am I strange for worrying about what happened?'.

What did a man often worry about at such times? He thought about trivial things.

"Then, I'll go to the training center. I can't go to the frontlines, but you never know what will happen."

"Yes, that would be nice. If I have time, shall we spar again?"

“...yes, thank you in advance.”

While hearing the answer from Tiera, who paused at the delicate situation, Shin prayed for her in his mind.

Shin had seen the two training when they had been travelling together, but from what he had seen, Schnee’s training was very hard. It was at the level where, without the remodeled wagon and the bed specially made by Shin, Tiera wouldn’t have been able to move due to the fatigue accumulated from training. It seemed that she couldn’t help but answer obediently.

She could fight adequately if she wanted to go to the frontline because she would be accompanied by Kagerou, but that didn’t mean that her own fighting power had increased. Thus, the training was unexpectedly effective.

When one only stuck to gaining levels, they couldn’t get really strong.

They entrusted their key to the innkeeper after they had finished their meal and departed.

Though Schnee and Tiera always attracted people’s eyes, with the ‘Flood’ monsters approaching, no one catcalled them.

Tiera and Kagerou headed to the guild on the way back, separating from Shin, Schnee, and Yuzuha who walked toward the castle.

“What will we be doing today?”

“We’ll be discussing cooperation and meeting with the Chosen Ones who will be dispatched. Actually, it’s also to see how much we can cooperate.”

Though he had already met Hibineko and the others, Shin had not yet met the rest of the dispatch group. Perhaps Rionne would be introduced too. Even though Chosen Ones had excellent individual ability, it was absurd to cooperate without preparing.

Because the fate of the city depended on them, it could be said it was only natural to do so.

“If I remember correctly, are we meeting Guile and Liege?”

“You already knew about them?”

“I heard about them in the guild. I heard we’ll attack with Guile’s magic skills, is he a mage?”

“Yes, his full name is Guile Serget. He is a mage who excels in flame system magic skills. The other one is Liege Latreia, who is a magic swordswoman like Rionne-sama.”

It appeared that Guile was a Lord, and Liege was a Dragnil. Schnee seemed to have had the opportunity to fight together with both of them several times before, as she seemed to know their personalities well.

While Shin was listening to Schnee talk about Guile and Liege’s combat styles and abilities, they arrived at the feudal lord’s castle.

Just before they entered the castle, Schnee canceled her disguise and walked to the gate with her original appearance. Though the change had been sudden, no one noticed the magic skill.

“Schnee Raizar-sama! Thank you for coming here!”

The gatekeeper who noticed them approaching saluted perfectly.

With the gatekeeper’s eyes fixed on Schnee, Shin’s presence wasn’t even noticed.

“Um, we would like to enter inside…”

“Huh?! Pardon me! Please show your permit!”

The gatekeeper really seemed to be unaware of Shin. The gatekeeper said in a hurry when Shin called out.

Schnee handed over a permit to the too enthusiastic gatekeeper. She seemed to have had received it beforehand.

Two people and an animal passed through the door opened by the gatekeeper, who confirmed their permit, and entered the castle.

One of the gatekeepers guided them with a happy expression. However, if one looked at the despairing faces of the other remaining gatekeepers, who continued working, it was obvious that a fierce fight had unfolded over this role.

(It seems excessive.) When they walked inside the castle, it was inevitable that they would pass by a lot of people. Most of them stopped walking; was it because they were fascinated by Schnee? They bowed politely.

The feeling that a number of people were following them increased as time passed; it was probably not just Shin's imagination.

"(Is Schnee popular?)"

"(Yeah, she is a strong and beautiful woman of a superior race. It's a given that she's popular.)"

While answering Yuzuha's telepathy, Shin felt depressed as he looked at himself.

The people who passed by mostly noticed Shin and Yuzuha after they had looked at Schnee. Also, about 90% of them had a "Who is that guy walking along with Schnee-sama?!" look on their face.

Though only a few of them had directed hostility at him, it didn't change that it was a pain in the ass. Shin regretted underestimating Schnee's popularity.

Had no one call out to her because everyone knew why she had come here? Shin felt relieved that as no one could openly ask who Schnee's companion was.

After a few minutes, the gatekeeper stopped in the front of a certain room. Apparently this was the location of the meeting.

"Raizar-sama. I wish to express my gratitude for your coming here."

"Don't worry about it. Are we late?"

"No, there is a person who has yet to come."

When the two entered the room, someone who was wearing the clothes of the highest quality among the people seated at the table stood up and gave Schnee words of gratitude.

Taul Yaxfell.

The figure with eyes that conveyed a strong sense of purpose and hair that was trimmed short was probably in his mid-40s. The body without flabbiness reflected his character.

“Shin-dono, your participation in defending our city together with Rionne-sama is indeed reassuring.”

“Ah, no, you don’t have to worry about it.”

When he had exchanged light greetings with Schnee, Taul also called out to Shin promptly. Though his speech was polite, his sharp eyes seemed to see through the character called Shin; perhaps this was what one would expect of the feudal lord of Balmel.

“There is still a little time before the discussion begins. I’ll ask someone to prepare drinks, so please make yourself at home.”

Taul said, and left his seat to step outside. Neither the dispatch group nor Rionne had come yet.

As they spoke to Hibineko and the others while waiting for a while, in addition to Taul and Rionne, two men and one woman entered.

“Then, now that all the members are present, I’d like to start the meeting by introducing the new members. As it’s their first meeting, let’s us all introduce ourselves briefly.”

Once he saw that everyone had been seated, Taul began to speak.

Starting from Shin and Rionne, who were participating on the spur of the moment, the self-introduction advanced in an orderly fashion.

“I’m Guile Serget. Mage. I’m in charge of first strike together with Raizar-dono this time. Nice to meet you.”

Although Guile had said he was a mage, due to his appearance, it would have been convincing if he had said he was a warrior. He had a refreshing visage of dark pupils and moderately long brown hair. His height was almost the same as Shin's, but Guile had more muscle mass. Although he was a lord, his appearance was no different from a human's. Perhaps it was because they would be testing their cooperation, but he had also brought a staff and a cloak.

"I'm Liege Latreia. I'm a magic swordswoman. This time I'll be assisting this guy with Rionne-sama. Let's get along well."

Liege was a woman who had a red hair like a burning wave and crimson eyes. She talked like a man, possibly due to her warrior class, but she was a curvaceous, well-proportioned woman who was 170 cemels tall.

Except for the small scales on the area around her eyes, she had no other characteristics of a dragnil. Unlike Shibaid, whom Shin had met before, her appearance seemed almost like a human's.

"So there are actually people who wear that here."

"Hmm? Is there something wrong?"

Liege asked. She seemed to have heard Shin muttering.

"Ah, no, I was thinking, is that a magic armor that Liege-san is wearing?"

Like Guile, Liege had also put on equipment meant for actual combat. However, what she was wearing was commonly called bikini armor. It had appeared in a part of the game, and was equipment that had questionable functionality as armor.

Shin, of course, knew what kind of equipment it was. Its official name was the 'Magic Armor of Dragon Ball,' and was medium rank《Legend》grade armor that used the jewel removed from a monster of dragon lineage.

As for why the armor was red in color, was because the jewel of a Red Dragon had been used. It nullified damage received under certain value, had an effect that further reduced damage, and couldn't be equipped with VIT less than 500. The part where skin was exposed had the damage decrease effect, so it was possible to say that she could catch a knife with her bare arm depending on her stats.

However, though its performance was high, it was not a very popular equipment in the game era. Because the game had been a VRMMO, where avatars acted as the players' actual bodies, not many women had wanted to wear it.

"Oh my, were you *that* fascinated by my armor? I felt your eyes on my chest."

Liege emphasized her chest after she said that. Although it was true that Shin had glanced at her chest, which was fully covered by her armor, he hadn't done so with ill intentions.

"Please pardon me..."

While thinking, 'don't tease me', Shin also wondered whether she was wearing that armor because of her character.

"Liege, leave the teasing behind. I'll continue introducing myself, I'm Elgin Schlafer. I'm the leader of knights of Balmel. This time, I'll take command of the army. I don't have the intention to relax because Raizar-dono is here. I hope to get along with you."

As a way of interrupting the banter between Shin and Liege, the next man introduced himself.

Perhaps it was because his work required him to shout often, but his voice resounded well. Since Shin had been troubled on how to respond to Liege, he thanked Elgin in his heart.

Elgin was a large man about 2 mels tall. His arms and legs doubled the thickness of Shin's. His figure was encased in a custom-designed armor which dominated the surroundings just by standing up. Shin didn't know if he was a Chosen One or not, but Elgin had a high level of 212. Was he in his late 30s or early 40s? There was a sharp glint toward Shin, also in a different sense from Taul.

Without stopping, Schnee, Hibineko, and the others also introduced themselves.

“Well then, let’s discuss the ‘Flood’ at once. Though you may have already heard, I’d like you to hear this again for confirmation.”

After the self-introductions were over, Taul began to talk.

Taul laid out a map on the table once he had everyone’s attention. It was a rough map that showed both Balmel and Kalkia.

“As a result of examining the information brought by Rionne-sama and Shin-dono, it was confirmed that large hordes of monsters are coming here. Judging from their travelling speed, they are expected to arrive at Balmel in approximately 4 days. The core of the horde is comprised of humanoid monsters, such as goblins, orcs, ogres and so forth.”

While presenting the information, Taul placed a troop marker down on the map to represent the group of monsters. In addition, he placed two markers in Balmel and four big markers behind them.

“Here are Shin-dono, Shadow-dono, Holly-dono, and Nekomata-dono of the first group. Schnee-sama, Rionne-sama, Guile-dono, and Liege-dono of the second group are here. You’ll wait 5 kemels in front of Balmel, while the knight squadron will spread out in the rear. After attracting the monsters to some extent, Schnee-sama and Guile-dono will attack with wide area magic. Meanwhile, because a lot of monsters are expected to remain near the the first group side, they will intercept them. While reducing their numbers, please also let some monsters pass to the rear in moderation.”

Taul re-explained his strategy verbally with the markers afterwards.

Defeating high-leveled individuals took first priority, defense was a primary concern and training was an additional bonus, Taul told them as he finished explaining.

“So, the first group will form a party and have cooperation training. Because the main duty of second group is to guard Guile-dono, you will train against Schnee-sama.”

“Eh!”

“Come again?!”

Guile stiffened at what Elgin had said, and Liege raised her voice almost to the point of screaming.

“Schn-nya-san is famous for her harsh training, you know?”

Hibineko whispered to Shin, who was looking dubiously at their reactions..

Apparently, hard mode was the standard even if the people Schnee trained weren’t her friends.

Only Rionne looked like she was looking forward to Schnee’s training; was it because she didn’t know how severe it would be? Or was it because she felt honored to be trained by Schnee?

“Don’t die!”

They would have time to recover even if they became exhausted. Schnee would surely work them to their very limits. Shin thought as he cheered them on.

“Then, we will go train as well.”

Following Schnee’s second group, Shin and his group also start moving.

Unlike the second group where Schnee acted as the opponent, Shin and his group went outside the ramparts of Balmel. They would train against the monsters that roamed outside during times of peace that were unrelated to the ‘Flood’.

Although the difference in abilities between Shin’s group and the monsters was too large to be a proper fight, there was no problem since they were simply practicing their cooperation.

“Shin, it’s been a long time since you and I formed a party.”

Shadow muttered a few words.

“Yeah. But in my case, perhaps I should say it’s been a long time since I joined a party.”

This was also the result of an excessive difference in ability. Shin rejected the party system because it was more efficient for him to challenge an enemy alone than it was for him to join a party and adjust to their level.

“There was no other way. It would have been too time consuming for you to train other players, right?”

“I don't think I'd be very happy if it was that easy for others to catch up to me”

Shin just said few words in response to Shadow’s remark.

While it was a good thing for other players to become stronger, Shin could not be honestly pleased with the prospect because he had already sacrificed so much to become strong himself.

Then Hibineko interjected.

“Leave the idle talk for later. We need to deal with these monsters seriously, even if they’re low ranked. You have to be on your guard!”

“...Right. Sorry, I was a little too excited.”

“I’m sorry.”

Shadow and Shin obediently apologized for being too excited about forming a party. Frankly speaking, they would remain unhurt even if they received a critical hit from the monsters to the face.

Hibineko also understood, so he wasn’t offended.

Then, Holly smiled wryly and began to talk.

“Hibineko-san is just as high-spirited, though.”

“An adult must have self-control.”

“So why is your tail moving more than usual?”

“...It’s to keep my b-balance!”

When walking on two legs, the tail has almost no effect in keeping balance. In the end, Hibineko was just as excited as Shin and Shadow.

Holly watched Hibineko with heartwarming eyes.

“By the way, we’re at the place where the monsters will appear.”

“As for me being in high spirits…Well, you’re right about that. A lot of wolf-type monsters should have appeared around here.”

Holly was making fun of Hibineko, but she didn’t forget to search for enemies in their surroundings.

While everyone had been having a playful conversation and moving at a high speed befitting of their status as Chosen Ones, they had already set foot in the area where monsters spawned.

However, not a shadow of monsters could be seen, even if they looked around.

“That strange. Not one monster in my perception range.”

“Not even one, you say?”

Shin’s perception range had been greatly expanded through multiple skills such as【Search】and【Sign Perception】. Therefore, he could perceive places where Shadow and Hibineko couldn’t reach, but he still couldn’t find a single monster.

Shadow and the others, who knew of his perception range, had puzzled expressions on their face.

“Does something like this usually occur during the ‘Flood’?”

“No. Though I have experienced the ‘Flood’ several times, even if the number of monsters may decrease a little, they didn’t disappear completely.”

“The number of monster decreased?”

“The monsters spawned in the ‘Flood’ indiscriminately attack other monsters. It is known that monsters will leave their territory when they sense danger.”

“I see. But something seems different this time.”

“Yeah, in the first place, even if I said their numbers decreased, it didn’t suddenly decrease like this. This is clearly abnormal.”

Shin and the other’s expressions sharpened at Hibineko’s remarks.

They had no problem dealing with the ‘Flood’, but now the monsters were mysteriously disappearing too. Everyone unanimously agreed that it was dangerous to be too optimistic.

“It’s not the time to train leisurely. Let’s return at once.”

“That’s right. We don’t know the cause, so it would be better to report it.”

Holly agreed with Shadow’s suggestion. Shin and Hibineko had no objections either, so they ran back to Balmel making full use of the speed of the Chosen Ones.

They searched for the presence of monsters all the the way back, but still didn’t detect anything.

“………”

“Shin? You’ve been silent for a while, do you have any ideas?”

“Yeah, a few.”

Shin replied to Shadow’s question with a bitter face. There was something that flashed in Shin’s memory.

There had been a war event in the game where hordes of monsters would attack a city. It had not been a particularly unusual event.

However, the sheer number of monsters had been a problem. The monsters in the surrounding area would temporarily stop spawning and a large swarm of monsters would close in on the city simultaneously like black waves.

Of course, the players stood up to it and succeeded in defending the city. Most of the monsters had been blown away by the magic skills of advanced level players like Shin. However, due to the monsters that invaded the city from underground, the damage caused during the event was not small either.

Monsters had disappeared before the event had begun. If this was supposedly the same indication, would the same thing happen in the ‘Flood’? If so, the new surging wave of monsters would exceed the normal scale of the ‘Flood’.

“Supposing it’s the same as a war event, we need to report it.”

“Indeed, I think I’ll ask Schnee to do that.”

Shin answered Hibineko’s words while nodding.

Schnee could explain the story as an event from the past. If she did that, Shin didn’t have to stand out.

“There’s no sign of monsters, you say?”

The four people who returned to the feudal lord’s castle got in contact with Taul immediately, and reported about the monsters. Everyone in the second group, Schnee and the others, also came to the reception room.

Taul who had listened to the report for a while, contemplated as he searched through his memory. However, he let out a small sigh, possibly because he could not think of anything.

Elgin and the others who were sitting together also shook their heads.

“As far as I know, there should be no records of this kind of battle. An investigation is needed.”

“The monsters sensed danger and ran away, then it couldn’t be explained with that.”

Judging from their attitude, they were very cautious about this matter circulating.

“Does anybody have any ideas?”

All members except Schnee shook their head at Taul’s words.

“Schnee-sama, do you have any ideas?”

“Yes, I recall something similar happened in the past.”

Schnee nodded at Taul's question. The story had already been conveyed to Schnee by Mind Chat.

It was only a story of the game from Shin's memory, but it wasn't strange to think that it could have occurred in this world.

"Could you tell me? Even the smallest amount of information is necessary."

"Of course. Though it happened quite a while before——"

Schnee explained while smudging the facts here and there.

"That…is…"

Everyone who heard the story had stiffened their expressions.

When they heard that level of monsters that would be attacking would also be high, Taul and Elgin's expressions became heavy.

The current defense called for a specialized force composed of Chosen Ones and ordinary soldiers to kill off the enemies as they came because there were simply too many of them.

If the monsters hordes became too much for ordinary soldiers to handle, they could expect that total collateral damage would be astronomical.

"Because the situation is only similar to what I know from the past, it's not clear whether it will turn out that way or not."

"No, it would be better to assume that it will. Now is not the time to talk about training and such."

Elgin replied to Schnee's remark with a serious expression. It would be too dangerous if Schnee's prediction was on the mark.

"I thought it would be an easy win this time."

"Good grief. Things have never gone smoothly."

Guile and Liege shrugged their shoulders as if they were saying "Give me a break!".

Though they had non-serious attitudes, it was hard to say that they had bright expressions, either.

"However, there's no need to be so pessimistic. We have Schnee Raizar and two additional Chosen Ones with us as reinforcements. We should be able to survive these critical times as long as we don't make any mistakes."

"Indeed, we don't know how many monsters there will be, but we are blessed with allies this time around. The battle may end unexpectedly quickly."

Hibineko and Shadow called out to Taul and the others who were only thinking about the enemy.

Their eager voices lightened the mood which was about to sink. They were composed because Shin and Schnee were there. In a sense, Shin and Schnee were far more dangerous than the approaching monsters.

"Of course, I'll do whatever I can to help."

"...That's right, I should be thankful you're here. Let's change the strategy, then. Schnee-sama, do you know which direction that the monsters will be attacking from?"

"No, I don't know to that extent..."

It was obviously dangerous to think the monsters would all attack from the same direction, so Schnee answered honestly.

Additionally, because they didn't know when the monsters would attack, they settled the discussion by agreeing to send scouts in the directions that were most likely to be attacked.

Each station was contacted when the discussion was over. This was done so the soldiers would be prepared in case the monsters from the war event spawned at any time.

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"Hey, Schnee, I'm asking just to make sure, but have you ever used the large-scale magic for any anti-guild wars while I was gone?"

“No, I have never fought against such a large army before, since most enemies can be handled with a normal wide area magic.”

Shin and the others who had left the castle had separated briefly before meeting up again.

Currently, they were heading toward the guild to meet Tiera. Though they could not fight against monsters for cooperation practice, they had tested their cooperation with a training dummy at the training grounds in the castle.

Because they had to fight against a considerable number of monsters this time, Shin wanted to confirm the power of anti-guild war magic skills with Schnee. But Schnee had not fought against a battalion since the ‘Dusk of the Majesty’, so she didn’t know how strong they were, either.

“Then, would it be bad to use them thoughtlessly? Will you try to use one during the first strike?”

“Yes, if I was to use it, that timing would be my only chance.”

Depending on the numbers of the enemy and the scale of the magic, it was possible for everything to end with just that one hit. Because it was not a bad thing in its own right, he decided to take the opportunity to confirm the power of large-scale magic.

“Schnee-chan’s large-scale magic, huh?~. I wonder if we’ll get a turn.”

“If it doesn’t cause any additional damage, then there would be nothing better than that.”

“Yea”

Shadow gave his opinion and agreed with Holly’s words. Hibineko did the same. Shin was neither optimistic nor excited about it.

“Well, we won’t know what happens until the time comes, right? I have to be prepared just in case.”

“Did you do something?”

“There was perfect equipment to fight against numerous enemies, wasn’t there? I intend to upgrade it before it’s too late. There shouldn’t be any problem if I go on a rampage since my face will be covered.”

Shin answered Schnee’s question with a slightly wicked smile on his face.

Apparently, his blacksmith’s blood was excited.

“...I won’t have any problem even if multiple enemies come at me the same time.”

“I agree.”

Shadow and Holly watched the exchange between Shin and Schnee while smiling wryly.

Hibineko didn’t say a word, but nodded in agreement.

When they had arrived at the guild, the party went to visit the training grounds after receiving permission from the receptionist.

The training grounds had various spaces designated for different activities, such as space where one could practice with the bow or with throwing knives, or space where one could receive combat instruction.

Shin had entered an empty training ground back in Bayreuth when he had fought Barlux the Guild Master, so this was the first time he saw others inside it.

Apart from that, Shin looked for Tiera.

“Oh, there she is.”

At a corner of the plaza where a lot of adventurers did cooperation and individual training, was Tiera. She was doing one on one combat training with someone.

“Is that Kaede-chan?”

“It’s seems so.”

Holly and the others also noticed Kaede and Tiera exchanging blows after Shin had spoken.

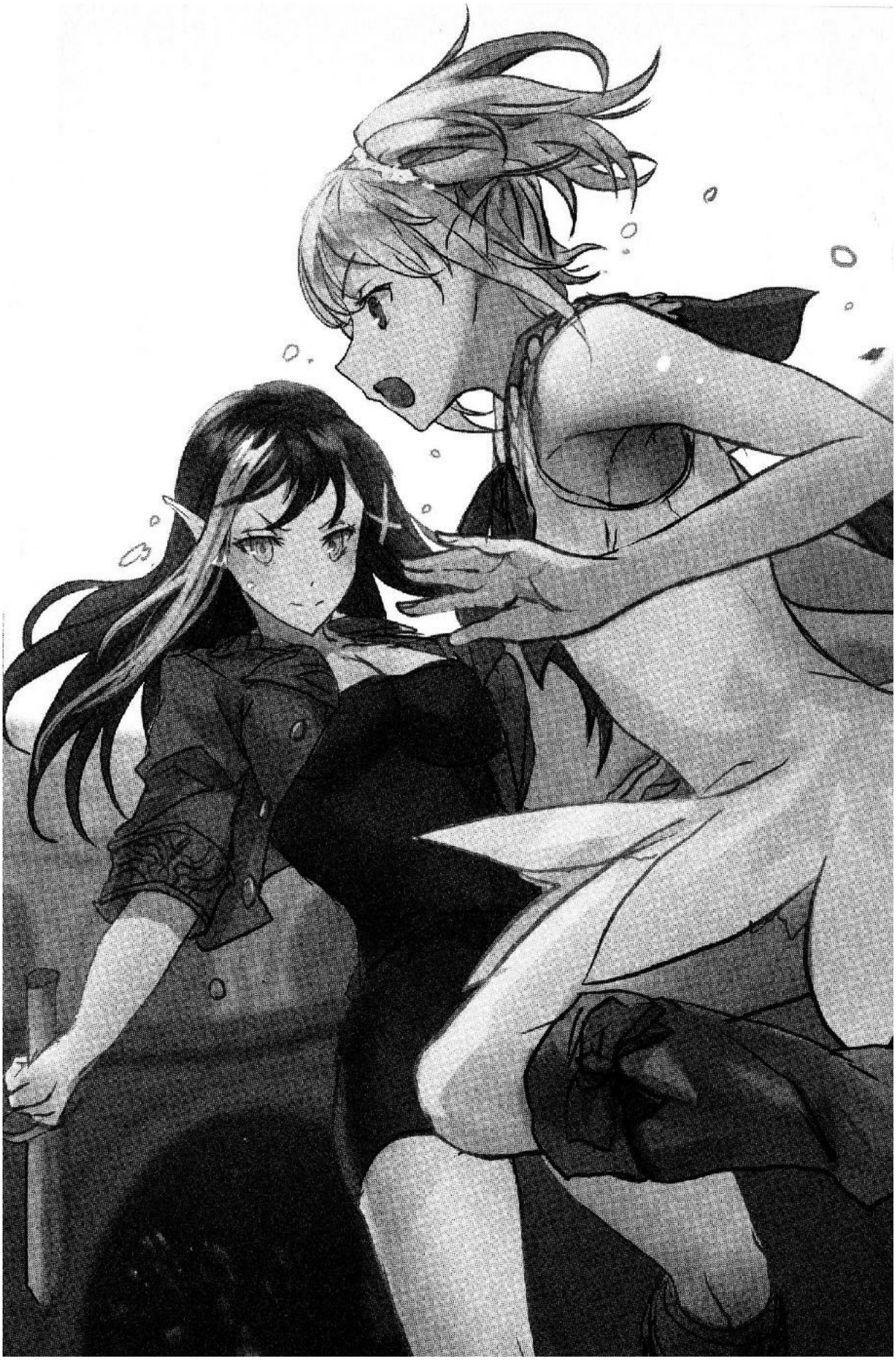
Both of their weapons were daggers. They seemed to be using weapons rented from the training grounds. Kagerou was on standby as he sat down next to a nearby wall.

“It’s one-sided, huh?”

“It’s rather a commendable thing for Tiera to keep up with her.”

Ahead of Shin’s line of sight, Tiera was on the defensive even though it appeared as if she were exchanging blows with Kaede.

If you thought about the difference between Kaede and Tiera’s stats, it was a commendable thing for Tiera to be able to defend against Kaede, just as Schnee had said.



Though Kaede probably wasn't being serious, Tiera shouldn't have been able to keep up with her for so long. Schnee's training seemed to have properly increased Tiera's combat ability.

"Kuh!"

Tiera's dagger was repelled before Shin could call out to her. Looking at the dagger pointed at the scruff of her neck, Tiera stopped moving.

"Having a match, huh?"

"Ah, Shin-san, Sch, no, Yuki-san is here too."

"S-Shin...?"

Kaede, who noticed Shin and the others, raised her voice. Tiera, too, turned her face toward the direction of Kaede's voice, but she couldn't move immediately because she was out of breath.

By the way, Yuki was Schnee's name when disguised. Her guild card was also registered under the name Yuki.

"Did you guys train together?"

"Yes, though we met by chance."

At first, Kaede had restricted her stats to train Tiera, but they decided to spar with their stat differences in the end. Then, Shin and the others had arrived.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes...I'm...okay.."

Shin called out to Tiera, who was completely drenched in sweat, while handing her a towel.

He waited for a while until Tiera's breathing settled down.

"Your training seems to have paid off."

"Well, I'm going to cry if this was all for naught."

"Is that so? For the time being, good work."

Kagerou also came near and showed Tiera some appreciation. Tiera laughed as Kagerou licked her face.

Shin and his group left the guild, taking Tiera and Kaede with them.

Shadow and the others were apparently famous among the people living in Balmel, because they were called out to from everywhere.

"You guys get called out a lot around here, huh?"

"Even though there isn't a lot around the castle, a lot of regular customers are in this neighborhood."

"Hmm…by the way, is it the food or Kaede-chan that draws in more customers?"

"It's 50% the food, 30% Kaede, and 20% Holly."

Shin had asked it as a joke, but Shadow unexpectedly replied seriously.

The popularity of cafe 'B&W', seemed to be split between the food and the female duo.

"There are people aiming for Holly-san, too?"

"What? Is there a problem?"

"N-No, no! No problem at all. But since Holly-san is Shadow-san's wife, I only thought that the customers would go for Kaede-chan."

Shin made excuses hurriedly to Holly whose eyes did not match the smile on her face.

"(She is happy to be treated as a young wife.)"

"(I-I see.)"

Kaede whispered to his ear in a small voice as Shin had a fake laugh. Even coming to another world didn't change that a woman wanted to appear younger than their years.

In terms of the appearance, Holly was a High Elf in her early twenties. Though the same thing could be said about Shadow, generally speaking, she looked quite young. In addition, Holly was a beautiful woman. Side by side with Kaede, they seemed more like sisters than parent and child. Even though she was a married woman, it was not strange that she had become popular.

To begin with, from the perspective of a High Elf and a High Lord, Holly and Shadow were still an age that could be called children. Though they thought of themselves as old from the perspective of the real world, that didn't apply in this world.

"Come to think of it, does an ex-player who came here have the same life span of their character's race? When I look at Shadow-san that seems to be the case."

"That's right. I'm not certain, but I believe I may have the same lifespan as my character's race. Not enough time has passed yet in this world to know for sure.

"Then, that's tremendous life span for the people with high race of the long-lived kind."

In the characters lore, High Elves and High Pixies were said to live for thousands of years. If that's the case, players would probably feel as if they had been given eternal youth, especially when compared to their prior human existence.

"You may have noticed, Shin-kun, but don't you also have a similar - or rather, an even longer lifespan than we do?"

"Going by character lore, I'm the one with the longest lifespan, was it?"

"A spirit, or something close to it was what had been written, I believe. I wonder how much of that was carried over?"

"Indeed…Although I don't particularly feel any different. What about you, Holly-san?"

"Hmm…It's not something I can really explain, but I feel like I've become proficient at harvesting plants."

Elves were dwellers of the forest. Their character lore described them as being able to communicate with plants on a simple level, so it might be the effect of that.

"I don't feel any change in particular. Maybe because I don't have the inherent abilities of the elves and pixies."

"No, I can't feel such changes either. I guess it also depends on the individual."

It seemed like Hibineko and Shadow could not feel any changes. In the past, when Schnee and Tiera held plant in their hands, they could see its life force aura. However those kind of things weren’t in the game either.

“There's no point in worrying so much. Isn’t it nice that those kinds of things also exist?”

“Well, I was only a little interested, I don’t intend to think about it so deeply.”

As Holly had said, they could not find an answer no matter how hard they thought about it, so there was no point in worrying over it.

After arriving at the inn where Shin and the others were staying, they parted ways for the day.

When he entered the inn, Shizu just came out from the kitchen.

“Welcome back! Shall I prepare a meal?”

“No thanks, we will eat later.”

She was the female beast and landlady they had met on the first day.

Shin and the others went to their own rooms for a while, and waited for Tiera.

After training, Shin and Schnee used the bath in feudal lord Taul’s residence. They had to wait for Tiera to change her clothes because they were all sweaty.

“I’m hungry~”

“You moved around a lot after all.”

Was it due to fatigue? Tiera put her face on the table exhausted.

“I'm relieved that the results from your special training have shown.”

“If I was made to do so much…”

“What is it?”

“No, nothing at all!”

Schnee reacted as soon as Tiera muttered absentmindedly.

Tiera didn’t think that Schnee had heard her because she had said it in a low voice. She straightened up quickly, and shook her head.

What would have happened if the results hadn’t shown? That was what Shin had worried about.

“Now then, should I head out?”

When he had finished his meal, Shin left the shop alone and began running towards the rampart.

Because there was a possibility that monsters would attack during the night, he intended to stand guard.

With his figure camouflaged by【Hiding】to match the rampart, he jumped to the top of the ramparts in one leap.

There was not a simple light outside the rampart. Visibility would fall down to zero if the clouds covered the moon.

Even in the dark, Shin’s night vision skill would normally allow him to see the shadows of any monsters. Yet, he still couldn’t see any. There were no reactions to his detection system skills either.

“It’s really weird that there’s nothing out there.”

Shin muttered alone, and then activated the earth technique wind combination skill【Silent Whisper】.

It was a skill which would notify a player when a monster invaded a fixed area. It worked not only on the ground but also detected monsters coming from underground.

He didn’t neglect the underground because he’d heard that monsters had come from underground in the past war.

“I guess this is alright. If only the boss who leads the monsters could be found, it would be over quickly.”

Though Taul and the others had already been informed, what Shin and his group had really worried about was the opponent what should be said to be the principal offender of the war event: a monster called ‘Raid Vice’. Raid Vice itself wasn’t a strong enemy. However, because it controlled the other races and moved them like its hands and feet, it was extremely troublesome.

In addition to having a military-like chain of command, it was a commander-like existence which controlled the ‘Leaders’ of every monster race. The monsters under its control had bonuses added to their abilities as well.

If the Raid Vice was defeated, its control would be dissolved. If it could be defeated before the real fight, the resulting lack of leadership meant there would be no need to be cautious of a surprise attack. In reality, though, it wouldn’t be discovered so easily.

Though they didn’t know whether or not Raid Vice would be the principal offender this time, the defenders were told to report immediately if it was found.

Since【Silent Whisper】didn’t require Shin to stay on the ramparts, he left the area and headed toward the forest where he had materialized Tsuki no Hokora the day before.

He then recalled the sensation of Schnee’s lips at the place where he took out Tsuki no Hokora, he almost writhed in agony but endured it somehow.

Shin shook off this feelings and reinforced the equipment, stored Tsuki no Hokora, and then went back inside the city. When he arrived at the inn, he went straight to bed.

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A few days later, the scouts reported incoming monster hordes.

Shin and his party of upper class Chosen Ones, the first and the second war group of Balmel knight squadron, were deployed in front of the city gate.

“No surprise attack in the end, huh?”

“Shin, you needn’t worry too much about the upcoming fight. We, the party behind you, will support you in case of emergency. Fight at the front with confidence!”

Standing next to him, Rionne tried to re-assure Shin while answering his monologue. Her equipment was the same as when she had fought in Kalkia. She carried『Muspelm』across her back. Her gear was the same as before because it was currently the best equipment she could equip.

“It’s a war of extermination, you know? Don’t cut corners. They will probably come. Although it’s just my intuition.”

“Do you think so too, Shin? I wonder why, but I get that feeling too.”

When asked, Liege and Guile said they also felt the same way. It appeared that their senses had become sharper as the large-scale war got closer. It was probably a feeling shared by those experienced in fighting wars.

“Don’t let your guard down!”

“You don’t have to tell me.”

Rionne did not look excited even though she had previous experience in warfare.

“Then I’ll leave my back to you.”

“Yeah, go!”

In response to Rionne’s parting words, Shin joined Hibineko and the others. When he passed Schnee, they nodded to each other.

“(The alarm system has been set up. Please be cautious just in case.)”

“(Certainly.)”

Because Berett and his subordinates were keeping a close watch inside the city, he didn’t have to worry too much.

However, there was a possibility that monsters could pass through the barrier like the previous Skull Faces had on the Wraith Plains. He didn’t think that there was a monster that could infiltrate without being detected by【Silent Whisper】, but no one know what would happen so he couldn’t be too careful.

When Shin arrived at the place where Hibineko and the rest were, they had already gathered and prepared for battle.

“You came? How’s the situation over there?”

“No problem in particular. However, everyone seems to feel a little uneasy.”

“As expected, huh? When it comes to it, you can leave it to us. In case the previous war event should happen, you should move to the rear, Shin. All the more so if you use the equipment in question.”

Hibineko who knew about the equipment, said while smiling. Hibineko carried the weapon which Shin had reinforced in his hand.

Hibineko was able to maintain his composure because, no matter the number of monsters, even if Shin was required to pull back from the front lines, Shin’s weapons reinforcements would be more than enough to counter them.

In addition the combination of, Hibineko, Shadow and Holly, in a party would represent a powerful fighting force on the front lines.

“I’ll be counting on you at that time. That equipment is hard to use when there are people around.”

“It’s nice to be powerful, but there is a big disadvantage. Although against opponents like this time, it will be terribly effective when Shin uses it.”

“The disadvantage was reduced a little with my smithing ability, so it became better than before. Well, even if it became easy to use, the risks of using it, however, may have increased.”

The equipment Shin was talking about was the kind of equipment that wouldn't be equipped by a normal player during the game era.

Though it was different if one person fought against weak opponents, at least the equipment couldn’t be used in the situation where one joined a party.

Shin wouldn’t use it if the opponent was a divine beast and a strong boss. It was effective simply because the enemies were small fry for Shin.

“For the time being, I’ll go wild with this guy.”

“『Kakura』, huh? It seems you had used it when you escaped from Kalkia with the princess, but will everything be alright?”

Hibineko asked, after Shin materialized『Kakura』from a card.

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

Shin was puzzled. He didn’t understand the point of the question.

“That kind of equipment is very rare now. I think the princess may have her eyes on it.”

“Yeah, it’s already too late though. I've already told her that I had found my weapon in some ruins, but I think that she was interested in me, too.”

“I thought of it by chance when I heard that both of you had worked together, but as I’d expected, she had her eyes on you, huh? It's probably a good idea to have many connections that can collect information for you for the sake of returning to the original world. But you have to use it depending on the other party. That’s something you need to be careful of.”

“I know. I don’t intend to seek assistance from the royal family, not yet anyway. I don’t know what kind of collateral they will demand in return.”

Setting Rionne’s interest aside, he was already marked as an individual with powerful war potential, so he didn’t want to incur any debts.

Shadow checked his watch as he walked up to them.

“Sorry to be in the way of your talk, but it’s about time.”

He informed the two that the fight was about to begin. Right at that moment, monster hordes began invading Shin’s perception range.

“I’m sorry. Well then, shall we go?”

“That’s right. Let them clear up the very front first.”

The preparations were already complete. Schnee and Guile's magic attacks were the signal for the planned assault.

"Here it comes!"

When the incoming monsters were close enough to see without even using【Far Sight】, Shin felt two magic power sources rise behind the military unit. Schnee's power had noticeably larger presence, so the smaller one was probably Guile's. Schnee's presence was so large that it overshadowed Guile's.

In a short amount of time, their magic power ascended and ran through the air. Guile's magic impacted the front of the monster hordes, while Schnee's magic kept rising high in the sky.

The first one to show effect was Guile's magic. From the height about 20 mels in mid-air, fireballs of approximately 5 mels in diameter poured down like rain. Each fireball crushed several of the goblins. Furthermore, nearby monsters were blown away due to the resulting explosion. The many fireballs and their explosive aftermaths, poured down constantly. The ones exposed to the attacks were helpless to escape.

What Guile used was the flame technique system magic skill【Meteor Fall】. It was a highly useful magic that was relatively popular in the flame technique system magic because it caused area damage. There were also many countermeasures for it because it was famous. But, it wasn't a concern when used against low-level monsters.

"So, here comes the real deal."

As if answering Shin's muttering, a jet black cloud appeared in the clear sky. It had strange motion like a recorded video being fast-forwarded.

Then, bolts of blue lightning struck the ground as the cloud began to expand.

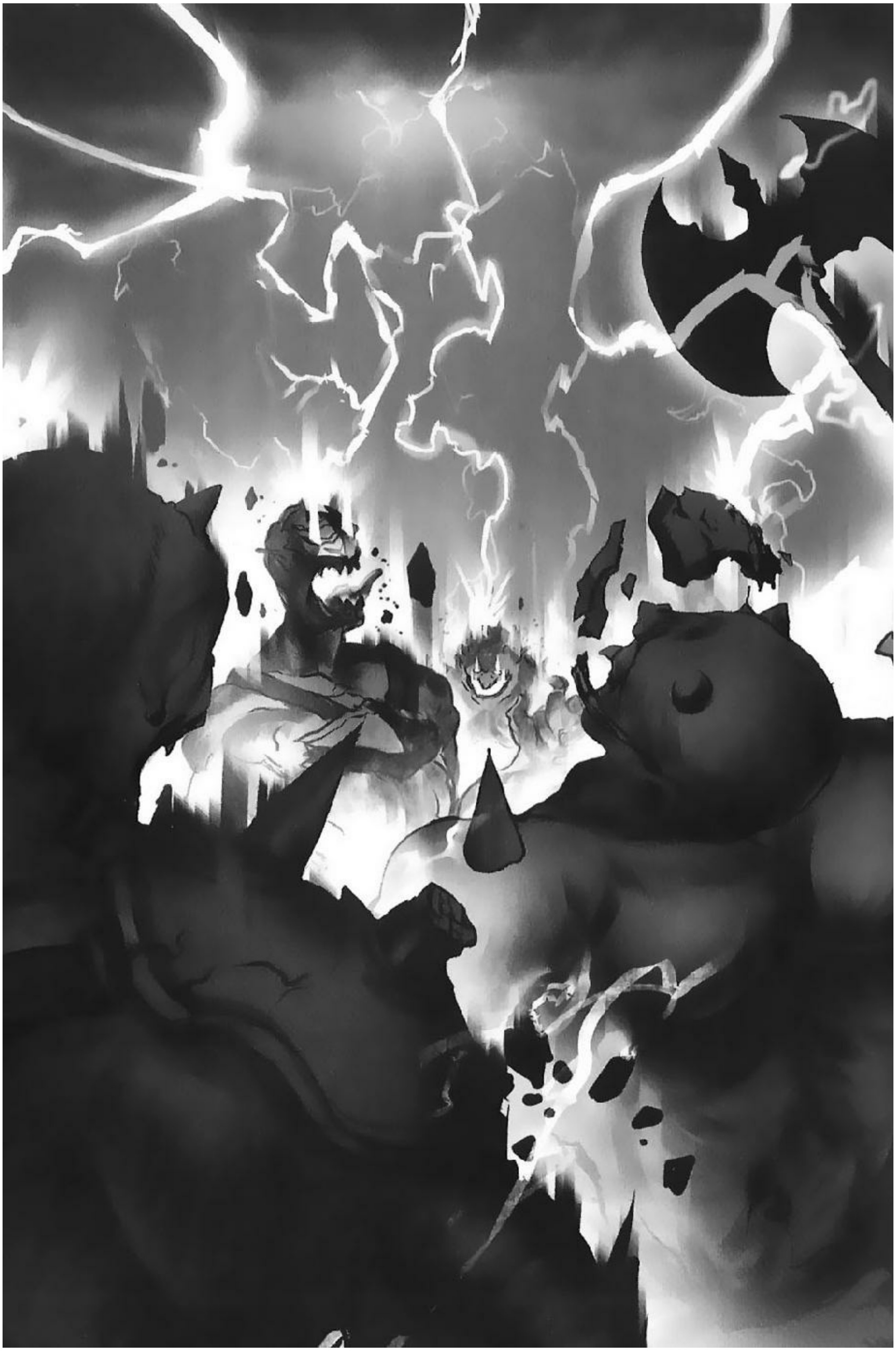
"————!? ————!——————!!"

The deafening roar, loud enough to drown out the explosive sounds of【Meteor Fall】, reverberated through the surroundings. The monsters, who seemed somewhat able to react to the fireballs, were dumbfounded by this and couldn’t grasp what was happening. The attacked hordes quickly fell into a state of chaos.

However, their nightmare had just begun. That was only the initial salvo from Schnee’s large-scale magic skill.

As the afterglow of the initial blue lightning bolts had faded, dozens of additional lightning strikes pierced the monster hordes. The lightning itself started 10 mels above the ground. When it struck the ground, it spread and became snake-like chains of lightning that devoured everything within a radius of 3 mels.

Unlike the explosion of the fireballs which could be defended against with a shield, the lightning was impossible to block with simple protective gear. The monsters couldn’t evade properly because it was too crowded. They didn’t have any choice but to wait for their bodies to be burnt alive.



“【Blue Judge】huh? In any case, this is again…”

Schnee seemed to have chosen the magic skill that she was familiar with to deal with the monsters.

Lightning technique system magic skill【Blue Judge】was a skill which was difficult to fend off, just like light technique system magic skills. In addition, when the enemy wore metal-based protective gear, it had an increased damage effect. This damage included the monsters that had simple equipment, like most goblins and orcs.

Shin and his group, who knew the power and the attack range of the magic skill, were unfazed by this display of Schnee's power. However, the soldiers who watching this scene at the rear grew pale.

The soldiers gazed in awe as the blue snakes devoured the black waves of monsters. The sight had shocked them beyond their expectations. Even Elgin, the leader of the knight squadron, was shocked by this display.

"………"

No one made a sound as they waited for the magic to end. Because the skill itself didn't continue for a long time, it wouldn't take long before the attack stopped.

As the last bolt of lightning struck the ground, the cloud which covered the sky cleared up and the afterglow disappeared.

As the sun came back out, countless craters and the charred remains of what once were monsters became visible.

There were no survivors within the range of effect, too.

Total devastation.

Those were the only words that could describe the result.

"………"

There was a different kind of silence coming from the soldiers than during the time the magic skill had been invoked.

Was it awe or fear?

It was unknown how much magic power Schnee used. But judging from the soldiers' reaction, it was clear that using large-scale magic for anti-guild wars should be avoided unless it was against a large army. That power was tremendous, Shin thought.

“Wow! It’s hard to believe I’m the same kind of High Elf.”

“She’s powerful, but that magic really makes an impact, too.”

Shin replied to Holly, who was amazed.

However, it was still a tense situation.

Because——

“After having killed so many, there are still this many left?”

Outside of the area of the magic skill’s effect, the number of monsters still exceeded the number that had been incinerated. They were still heading toward Balmel.

There had been a gap after the first wave, could this possibly be the second wave?

Schnee had killed well over 5000 monsters with her magic. To have reduced their number that much and still leave an equal or more amount of monsters than that, there was only one documented event that matched this.

“Hibineko-san, isn’t this the ‘Large Flood’?”

“It looks like it. I heard the probability of it happening was only about once in every 100 years. I guess this is it.”

The ‘Large Flood’ was a higher version of the ‘Flood’ which was said to have happened no more than 3 times in Balmel’s history.

Though the quality of the monster didn’t change, it was not unusual for their numbers to reach 10 times more than normal. The conditions for the outbreak were unclear, but when it had happened before, Balmel had been forced to keep fighting for several days, and only were able to pull through because their neighboring countries had provided them with reinforcements.

“(Schnee, can you make another shot?)”

“(No, it appears that I can’t use that magic again. Even if I try to invoke it, there’s no response.)”

As expected, it was not the situation to hold back; Shin had wanted her to attack again, but it didn't seem that it was possible.

Then, when Shin tried to invoke large-scale magic, his magic power kept flowing out but there’s no change in his surroundings.

(What is this? My mana is flowing out, but the magic skill isn’t activating.)

He didn’t know why, but it had taken time to reuse a large-scale magic during the game as well.

As they charged forward, the surviving monsters trampled over the incinerated remains of their fellow monsters. They were undaunted by the destructive magic that had been unleashed. Unlike normal monsters, the monsters that spawned from the ‘Flood’ had almost no rationality or emotions. It was as if they were only programmed to attack.

For this reason, they didn’t react to the magic exploding in front of them.

“It appears that they will keep fighting to the last monster.”

“It’s because they won’t withdraw even if they can’t win. A ‘Flood’ is basically a war of extermination.”

The monsters would kill until the last one of them was defeated. According to Shadow, that seemed to be how the monsters fought in the ‘Flood’. As Rionne had said as she wielded her sword earnestly, Shin was able to understand that, too.

“If it doesn’t remain one-sided, we’ll get our turn soon.”

“So a power like that wasn’t able to make the battle one-sided, right?”

As Shadow had said, the monsters were spread out evenly as far as they could see. To begin with, the magic that Schnee had shot had almost annihilated the first wave of the monsters, unlike the moments earlier, the present state didn’t stay one-sided against the monsters. Even if you were to assess the calculation error, given that only the number that did not remain was from the Second Wave, it was not possible to say that it was very noticeable even if they were to be collectively joined.

"It's slightly different from the plan, but I'll lead the monsters towards the front of the first layer of heavy knights. Both of you, please be careful not to lead too many to them, so they don't get overwhelmed."

Shin and Shadow nodded at Holly's warning. Hibineko acknowledged her wordlessly by raising his chin while tossing small dried sardines into his mouth. Though it was an item with stats strengthening effect just in case, his had the impression that seemed to say he was probably acting playfully if he was not an upper class Chosen One.

"Let's go then!"

As soon as Shin finished commenting, four people kick the earth and began to mobilize. Though they had to match Holly's slower speed, with the aid of their equipment, they were still much faster than riding a horse.

At that speed, they approached the hordes of monsters in a flash. While moving, Holly buffed each party member.

From the start, their offensive, defensive, and even their magic defensive power were thoroughly reinforced. On top of that, their powers were further increased by the additional effect of the reinforcement of their weapons.

"I'll attack first!"

"Of course."

"Fumu, your blood rages, huh?"

Shin, Shadow, and Hibineko as the three vanguards, plunged into the hordes of monsters while smirking.

It was a battle formation with Shin at the center, Hibineko on the left, Shadow on the right, and Holly in the back.

Of course, the first one to make a move was Shin. With『Kakura』ready on his shoulder, he stepped on and crushed the ground. By invoking the skill of instantaneous acceleration he moved instantly to the front head of the pack.

“Here’s a greeting from me!!”

While riding the force of the acceleration, Shin swung down『Kakura』. His first victims were a group of orcs.

Shin had invoked a weapon skill which included a mallet technique and wind technique combination skill called【Amber Wave Strike】. This caused a high-density wind to coil around『Kakura』. He swung it down while aiming at the orcs at the very front. A thick “DOOM!” sounded, and aided by the compressed wind, a single blow of『Kakura』crushed the orcs in front and the approaching group behind them. A radial crater appeared in the ground where『Kakura』struck. Small monsters like goblins vanished from just the shock wave of the blow.

【Amber Wave Strike】had the effect of strengthening the range and power of the strike of the wind technique; it was an effective skill to suppress the front of a pack.

More fissures in the ground that were about 10 mels wide and 50 mels long formed from the radial crater Shin had created. All of the monsters within range had been reduced to nothing more than smears on the ground.

Shin lifted『Kakura』from the crater, and took a stance. The wind technique from【Amber Wave Strike】no longer covered『Kakura』. The next skill he activated was a mallet technique and flame technique combination skill【Scarlet Phoenix Wizard】. A crimson light enveloped the surface of『Kakura』with the flow of mana. When he waved it horizontally, the flame of the Crimson Lotus projected toward the monsters.

It was a skill with an orthodox effect that was said to increase attack range and bestow flame attribute. The only limitation was that the effect would disappear after the first long distance attack was performed.

Though a lot of people used the long-range attack after the skill's timer had run out, but Shin used it immediately because the attack was more effective when there was a lot of time left to the skill

Following the trajectory of『Kakura』, a crescent-shaped flame was formed. The flame, which rapidly increased in volume as it shot away from Shin, charged forward and turned all the monsters in its way to ashes. In front of Shin was a 30 mel wide corridor of flames, in which most of the monsters were roasted. Even if the crowd of monsters tried to close the gap, the remaining flames swelled up quickly and exploded. The individual monsters who were near that heat and shock burst open, turning their swords and armor into shrapnel which, pierced the monsters gathered near the explosion.

“Here I am!!”

Shin activated the taunt skill【Shura Rush】to attract the monster’s attention. Among the provocation skills that attract the monster’s attack target to the user,【Shura Rush】was known for its wide area of effect.

Shin prepared『Kakura』as he cast a sharp glance toward the incoming monsters.

If he listened closely, he could hear similar explosions from not too far away. It looked like Hibineko and Shadow had commenced battle too.

◆◆◆◆

The fist fighter, Hibineko, engaged the enemy shortly after Shin.

The usually casual Hibineko's eyes had changed into those of a hunter's, with the prey already determined.

Without losing momentum or speed, he took a step and accelerated even more. He glided through the air with a jump kick.

Emerald green light was emitted from the greaves equipped on his legs, which were enhanced by Shin. Hibineko used the barehanded-wind technique combination skill【Autobahn Kick】and plowed through, crushing the monsters he collided with.

It was a convenient skill for hitting a large group of monsters, with a cannonball-like kick, and also for movement. Hibineko had used the skill on the frontlines of the monster hordes.

Although Hibineko was short for a man, the aftermath of his kick, which was clad in the wind technique and received the blessings of the enhancement skill via his equipment, destroyed even the monsters that were outside its effective range.

Hibineko challenged the hordes head-on as they were scattered around by that kick's power.

If Shin, who had access to the map function, looked at the map, he would see a clear line cut straight through a sea of red enemy markers.

"I can't fall behind Shin and the others!"

Hibineko who dove into the crowd using the barehanded and flame technique combination skill【Echo Blast】, mightily flung his right leg against the ground. The crack on the ground where Hibineko stamped spread like a spiderweb, and after a few moments, bluish-white flames burst from those cracks.

The tremors that spread from Hibineko, who was at the epicenter of the skill, monsters nearby lose their balance while flames erupted from the ground and roasted them. Though it was a skill that dealt damage regardless of friend or foe, it wasn't a problem since he was only surrounded by enemies.

Due to the synergy between the reinforced weapon and the support magic cast on it, its skill and range of effect had risen tremendously and could not be compared to its previous state. When the skill ended and the flames died down, Hibineko was left in a bubble devoid of monsters with a radius of 100 mels.

More monsters then approached him in order to reoccupy the empty space.

As for Hibineko, he wore the smile of a carnivorous animal. He kept on attacking the monster hordes.

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Across from Shin on the other side of Hibineko, Shadow was silently carrying out a massacre.

A black shadowy figure ran, slicing through the monsters leaving only cut lines lingering in the air. For a short time, the monsters seemed unaffected.

Then, when the they moved a little, they fell apart along the slice lines.

“As expected, a weapon made by Shin is on another level.”

Shadow muttered unintentionally, admiring the dagger he held in his right hand.

The dagger was lighter compared to before Shin had reinforced it, and yet it drew a stronger killing blow. As if being buffed by the weapon’s newfound power, he felt even his body control had increased.

As a matter of fact, his physical strength had went up too. If one had to say, the way it had risen up was different; there were no stats that had been improved. It had been adjusted for the owner from the beginning. It was the case for Hibineko and Shadow. So, it was natural that the state of reinforcement was varied as well. It became smoother and closer to the ideal image in their minds. With his body moving as he imagined, Shadow felt happier while being on the battlefield.

“*Sigh* I don’t remember feeling this in the game.”

As Shadow ran, his excitement was charged into his weapon.

It was totally different from Shin and Hibineko’s fighting style; there was only long and silent movements.

Only the screams or roars of the monsters, and the sounds made by monsters' equipment could be heard. There were no explosions or shock waves, but the number of the monsters decreased steadily.

“…*Swish*!”

A voice like a sigh leaked out. During that short pause, 8 to 10 slice lines were made. However, no less than 10 monsters had fallen.

Using the fencing and water technique combination skill【Blade Stream】the cutting lines were exerted in the air every time the dagger was wielded. The blade of water generated by the water technique shone under the light of the sun. Though there was something called waterjet cutter that could even cut through steel in the real world, the power of this skill greatly exceeded that.

Water based magic could be prolonged by making the water thin and long, like hairs. The monsters called goblin knights, which had the skin harder than iron, and ogres, which had muscles like bundled steel, didn’t stand a chance.

The blades of water that extended from the dagger were almost as sharp as the dagger itself due to the skill. In other words, be it the muscle mass or the skin, there was no other result than to be cut down in one stroke.

The radius of the Shadow’s attack was about 20 mels. While normally the dagger was considered a short-ranged weapon, Shadow’s range of attack was like a different weapon altogether.

Even if it was not as flashy, the speed with which Shadow exterminated monsters wasn’t inferior to Shin or Hibineko’s.

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Holly was observing the enemy’s movement while focusing on the fight in front of her.

Even though Shin and the others were separated from each other by some distance so that they didn’t get caught up in each other's attacks, to the monsters, it was no different than if they were fighting together. The shocks and the sounds Shin and the others made gradually started to draw the entire crowd toward them.

“(The crowd on the front right has begun to flow to this side. The feint operation seems to be going well.)”

The three acknowledged Holly's Mind Chat with a few words and increased their extermination speed.

If it ended early, they wouldn't have to worry about a surprise attack.

Schnee and Guile attacked the hordes that were not heading straight for Shin and the others with long-ranged magic. Though large-scale magic for anti-guild war was not useable yet, normal magic skills could be used without a problem. Due to Schnee's specialty, lighting and water techniques, and the flame technique from Guile, they killed more monsters than Shin and his party combined.

"Now, I need to do my work too."

Holly said as a great number of flame bullets appeared in midair.

She targeted behind Shin and the others. Even if the three used skills that attacked on all directions and extend its ranges, they could still face unexpected defeat. As the monster hordes numbered several thousands, it was impossible to keep fighting without running out of energy under the present conditions. Therefore, Holly shut down the possibilities of unexpected defeat.

"Please go."

Under Holly's command, the flame bullets which remained in midair started to move. The flame bullets scattered in the ratio of 2:4:4 toward the directions of Shin, Hibineko, and Shadow. They flew to the monster hordes which were relatively large, moved to close the gap of their attack, and hit the center of the group.

With an explosion, the weapons that the monsters carried and parts of their bodies were scattered in all directions.

"I'm not done yet!"

After she finished firing the flame bullets, Holly raised her stick above her head.

"Come fall!"

The skies above the monster hordes changed as she spoke.

A portion of the sky warped as if it had been covered by a giant glass lens. Then, it fell little by little toward the monsters on the ground within the spell’s range of effect.

The monster hordes this time were mostly composed of humanoid monsters but naturally, there were many other monsters too.

What Holly had aimed at were the flying-type monsters which would become troublesome if left unattended, even though there were only a few of them. What could be seen were ‘Head Eagles’ which looked just like enlarged eagles, and small pterosaur ‘Airnodons’ which had membranous wings like the Pteranodon.

Both were about level 180, and their physical strengths were low but their hit & run strategy of swooping down and flying away was a bad match for knights who couldn’t use magic skills. Though some of the knights could shoot them down with throwing spears or kill them when they were swooping down, it would take at least half of the soldiers to achieve that.

Because Holly had knocked them down to the ground, the knights were able to deliver the decisive blows. While it’s true that high-level monsters didn't weaken at all when they were dropped onto the ground, the knights easily dealt with the flight-type monsters that Holly had cast down because the monsters were low-level and an easy target after they had fallen.

“Still, there’s a lot as expected.”

Holly grumbled unintentionally, while she fired additional flame bullets at a speed that would shock a mage similar to Guile if seen. It was not Holly's first time dealing with the 'Flood', but even Holly would get tired by the sheer number of monsters in this 'Large Flood'. Even with the assistance of the strengthened equipment by Shin, she couldn’t cover all the three vanguards’ leftovers.

Naturally, Holly didn’t think she could deal with all the monsters which were moving independently too. The individual monsters who passed through the three vanguards and Holly's attacks were dealt with by the first and the second war groups of Balmel’s defense knight squadrons.

Berett had said that the experience in war against the monsters was low, but that had only been based on Rokuten’s standards in the game era. Compared to other soldiers in other cities, Balmel's knights were rather capable. The levels of the soldiers surpassed 150 on average. Their captain’s levels were in the 180 range. Elgin's, the leader of the knights, level exceeded 200.

Since soldiers were not Chosen Ones, when they were up against mutant monsters with levels close to 300, they normally would take damage to some degree. However, with their skills and cooperation, Elgin and his corps could defeat mutated monsters without making any sacrifices. In the game era, these kinds of courageous warriors were known as 'cheats' in a different sense of the word from Shin and the others.

“Be careful of your surroundings so as to not obstruct others! Don’t slack off until you make sure it’s dead!”

Elgin's voice resounded as he took command. It reached the knights without being drowned out by the explosions and roars of the monsters.

Even if their opponents were low-level monsters like goblins, they fought seriously. At the rear, there was Schnee and her party, and the third and the fourth war groups were also standing by. They didn’t overlook details in the defense arrangements.

Up to now, much of the burden had been borne by the ladies. Because this was a blot on the knight squadron’s chivalry, the first and the second war group of knights were roused to a new high. Although they were inferior in individual ability, their teamwork more than compensated for this, allowing the number of monsters to be reduced quickly and reliably.

While the number of monsters shrank at an increasing rate, a change was felt in the monster hordes which were heading toward Shin and the others.

“It’s covered with ‘Worker Ants’. The ones jumping, are ‘Little Hoppers’, huh?”

“They’re mainly insect-types?”

“Fumu, this will be a little troublesome.”

While the three were physically separated, their words were delivered as if they were right next to each other.

Shin who confirmed the name of the monsters with【Far Sight】, Shadow who looking at the battle field as a whole and saw the monster mix change from humanoid type to insect type, and Hibineko who was concerned because the insect types were hard to kill, had said respectively.

The main group of humanoid monsters, mainly goblins and orcs, spread out and created a path 200 mels wide. Into this path came the insect type monsters. Just as their names suggested, the Worker Ants and the Little Hoppers which Shin spoke a while ago were monsters who were giant versions of ants and grasshoppers. They were about 1 mel high. They were low-level monsters who didn’t have prominent abilities. On the other hand, they had the abilities that the smaller versions of these insects had. The Worker Ants had powerful mandibles, and the little hoppers had the jump ability of the grasshoppers.

A majority of the monsters were Worker Ants. The Little Hoppers and other insect type monsters jumped up and down to close the few gaps.

“(Schnee, can you check the monster hordes from over there?)”

“(No, I still cannot see far enough into the inner groups of monsters yet. Did something happen?)”

“(The mix of the monsters has changed. Worker Ants have become the main attackers and other insect type monster are heading this way.)”

“(It’s just the way the records document, right? Got it, I’ll contact the person commanding at the rear here.)”

Shin and his party were closer to Elgin who commanded all the knight squadrons. Schnee was closer to the adjutant who was commanding the third and the fourth war groups which were waiting at the rear so, it was decided she would notify him.

“(Holly-san, can you contact Elgin-san?)”

“(I am close. Leave it to me.)”

After asking Holly to pass the message to Elgin, Shin plunged into the group of monsters again.

Shin was 300 mels in a straight line from the first group of Worker Ants. Because there were about 100 mels space between the groups, if the monsters were defeated, there would be about 200 mels distance before he contacted the third wave.

In order to keep misses to a minimum, Shin used a skill that increased the range of his weapon. Shin let the aura that had enveloped and extended from the tip of『Kakura』to lengthen to just under 10 mels. A single sideways blow sent masses of goblins flying. The orcs who tried to engage with swords were turned into minced meat including their armors.

Among the monsters, several ‘Ogre Commanders’ were seen. These were monsters of mutation class that were also described in the documents of the guild. However, they were only high-leveled in relation to rest of the horde of monsters. With levels of at best 300, they were no different than a regular goblin to Shin and his party.

An Ogre Commander swung down a large 3 mel long sword, which it probably acquired when evolving, with all its might. It attempted to bisect Shin along with its allies. Shin counterattacked, and struck against the sword’s side with『Kakura』. The sound of metals clashing reverberated with a “Gin!”, Two thirds of the big sword that had approached Shin flew into the air.

The large sword was actually larger than『Kakura』; on the other hand, for mass and quality,『Kakura』was overwhelmingly superior. Since Shin struck with his physical strength at the side of the sword which was also its weak point, it was inevitable for the sword to either break or bend.

“Gi…?”

The Ogre Commander who saw his sword snapped to nearly ½ size, cried out in a stupid voice. In its mind, it had been certain that Shin had been cut in half.

The Ogre Commander was slow to react and left a small opening. Shin, who couldn’t overlook that chance, hammered『Kakura』into its head as a gift in return.

The blade with a dark red aura formed by the effect of the skill, nearly bisected the Ogre Commander. It split him from its head to its inseam in a stroke.

A moment later a huge amount of blood spurted over the surroundings.

“Next is the bugs, huh?”

After the group of humanoid monsters were cleaned up, Shin turned his gaze toward the insect types who were approaching. There were signs of Shadow and the others in the distance too. Apparently, most of them had already finished. The monsters which didn’t come toward Shin and his party, had already been turned to ash by Schnee and Guile.

“(Everyone listen, there’s no change to the strategy. We exterminate them without stopping!)”

“(Roger!!)”

To Holly’s voice, Shin and the rest replied in unison.

Then suddenly, a thought came to Shin.

“(Shadow-san, Hibineko-san, do you have a moment?)”

“(What was it?)”

“(If everyone uses【Scarlet Explosion Palm】, we can wipe out the majority of our opponents. Should we take the initiative and lead everyone to victory using a combined attack from the three of us?)”

“(I see, that one, huh?)”

Hibineko remembered another party situation like this where two or more players were up against a vast number of monsters and they decided to use the skill called【Scarlet Explosion Palm】.

Shadow also seems to have remembered a similar situation, as he returned with a voice of agreement when he heard Shin's suggestion.

"(If we do it with the three of us, wiping out a vast area of monsters will not be a problem with this skill.)"

"(Interesting. I'm in)"

"(Me too.)"

Hibineko and Shadow quickly agreed to Shin's idea. In the meantime, the group of monsters had already approached to within 50 mels.

"Let's go!!"

The three didn't worry about the approaching monster hordes. They didn't bother, because soon, the hordes would be taken care of by this attack.

The three clenched their fists, and focused their power on their right hands. Boosted by the reinforced equipment, even before they could invoke the skill, large craters formed just from the power of their fists. The three of them took a similar stance of shooting from the hip.

There was to be no signal. The three people's senses had become sharp on the battlefield. They wouldn't miss the timing.

"—!!"

The moment when the distance to the monster hordes closed to 30 mels, the three simultaneously thrust out their fists without any prior notice.

Their fists focused on one place around Shin; The power accumulated in each respective fist was released. After a momentary delay, the direction and the attributes were given; the power which had been focused into a single spot, was then shot into the approaching enemy.

The released mass of energy from the three people rapidly swelled up. The chosen attribute was flame. The cluster of flame blazing up transparently because of the overwhelmingly high temperature, then rushed towards the approaching monster hordes.

As it reached them, the monsters bodies were scorched, and then reduced to ashes in the next moment.

If one was to observe the strange place, in spite of the fact that their bodies were burned, there was no fire visible. The flame was so hot, it had become completely transparent. Boosted by the upgraded equipment, only the heat waves were visible as the invisible fire roasted the enemy.

The fire didn't just stay around Shin and the others, it spread out into the monster hordes. The flames spread the same way water spread when it flowed on the ground. As for its range, it already vastly exceeded the range of wide area magic that had been shot by Guile.

The Worker Ants had become a mountain of ashes. Something that hopped like Little Hoppers fell to the ground. Though there were superior individuals like the Ogre Commanders, they too, turned to ashes without even coming in contact with the enemy.

Cooperative mode【Complete Destruction Palm】skill.

It was a skill that could be invoked when 2 or more players combined the barehanded and flame technique combination skill【Scarlet Explosion Palm】. Its power and effect range increases as the number of people who use it increases. Since the stats of the player and the power of the player's equipment governed the ultimate power level,【Complete Destruction Palm】that Shin and his group invoked was far above the expected power of three people.

"...Though I expected the power to increase, that was overwhelming!"

"I wasn't expecting this either. "

"Ah~...Flame is really effective against insect types. It was really powerful because of that, right?"

They were all surprised by the overwhelming power.

"Now's our chance, let's clean up as much as possible."

“Yeah, I don’t know how many monsters are left either. But there’s no reason not to be efficient about this.”

“You’re right. There’s no need to defeat everything individually.”

When they finished the discussion, Holly warned the knight squadron. The three then quickly fired【Complete Destruction Palm】again, at a range that didn’t threaten their allies. 20% of the right wing of the hordes disappeared in the next shot, and the remainder were melted away by 4 additional shots.

The monster hordes had been like a black wave that covered the earth. Some soldiers were simply aghast at the spectacle where nearly half of the hordes were destroyed in such a short amount of time. However, since the monster hordes were destroyed by allies and because it reduced the danger, the soldiers didn’t think too deeply about it.

Even though people knew that Shadow and Hibineko were strong, nobody could have guessed how powerful they really were.

“Looks like it’s animal types next.”

Without being aware of the soldiers’ shock, the three intently fixed their eyes on the enemy.

Behind the third wave, Shin saw a number of animal types. There were groups of animal type monsters such as wild boars, wolves and bears. He was able to confirm both ‘Tetra Grizzly’s and ‘Flame Boar’s which he had fought before.

“Is it the fourth wave?”

“What the heck! How many waves are there?”

Shadow and Hibineko looked at the monsters while sighing. The ‘Large Flood’ was a phenomenon that generated multiple times more monsters than a normal ‘Flood’. From the change of the monster types, it was likely that it had already generated four times more monsters than normal.

The ‘Large Flood’ mentioned in the records, was described as being like an average ‘Flood’ repeated three times over. The current large flood had already surpassed the documented one. At this point, nobody knew how much longer it would continue.

“I’m gonna jump a little to see how deep it is.”

Saying this, Shin jumped with his full strength which caused the ground to collapse from the power of the jump. He gained altitude with the help of martial arts movement skill【Flying Shadow】.

When he reached an altitude where he could look over the fourth wave, Shin used【Far Sight】to gaze deeper.

“Beast rider warriors huh?”

Behind the animal type groups, he saw the last group moving with a 300 mels gap between them and the fourth wave. The last group was a mixture of humanoid types and animal types. The size of this wave was almost double what they had faced so far. There were small species types like goblins and kobolds, but Shin was also able to confirm riding animal types of monsters.

Monsters such as goblins and kobolds were individually weak so they may have learned how to ride and handle animal type monsters to compensate. These were called beast rider warriors or otherwise ‘~Rider’. Not only did their mobility increase, but it was known that their combat ability was also greatly enhanced.

Unusually, the increased mobility of the beast riders allowed them to reduce the gap between the fourth and fifth wave.

“The fifth wave is closing the gap between groups. Because most of the last group are beast rider warriors. Their number also twice as many.”

Shin who had landed, conveyed the things he saw to Shadow and the rest. Though they didn’t have any problems with the enemy’s fighting power, it was the enemy's mobility which could make things difficult if they dispersed.

Since they were on a plain, it was advantageous for a mobile enemy. It was different than when in the forest or in complicated terrain. For cavalrymen on a plain, especially with beast rider enemies like this time, the ordinary soldiers at the rear would be forced into a hard fight. It was particularly difficult because the monsters could jump over closely held lines of spears.

Though there were also cavalrymen in the knight squadrons of Balmel, it would be difficult to follow the monsters' nimble movements even with trained warhorses. How they sealed the mobility of the enemy would become the decisive factor.

"Coping with them is possible if they don't scatter haphazardly. Just to be sure, I'll tell Holly to prepare to use soul technique."

"Holly-san's soul technique? Oh, come to think of it, Holly-san's soul technique is ideal for a situation like this. "

Soul technique was a skill exclusive to elves. Though each player or support character was assigned one attribute, they could use techniques that gave a different effect from their baseline attributes with magic skills.

The attribute of Holly's soul technique was earth. It was suitable for sealing the opponent's movements and installing obstructions rather than for attacking. It was a very effective way to reduce the mobility of the beast rider warriors.

"Then, for the rest of them agai——!!"

A loud alarm sound reached Shin's ears when he started to say cleanup of the remaining monsters. That sound, which only Shin could hear, was from the【Silent Whisper】which he had set around Balmel. It was a warning that sounded when a preset number of hostile presences were detected.

"Shin, what's wrong?"

"Apparently, they have come at last. There was a reaction in【Silent Whisper】."

“They have come at this time huh? Do you know their direction?”

“They are at the north gate, near the third war group.”

Shadow asked, after Shin broke off in the middle of speaking. The distance from the【Silent Whisper】to Balmel was approximately one kemel. There was a possibility that the third war group was already moving.

As for why hadn’t Shin and his party been notified, had nobody seen the enemy yet? Or was it because there was no one who could use Mind Chat? It seemed likely to be the former.

Soon after that thought, an indication of a message appeared on Shin’s view. The contents were about the monsters approaching Balmel and the third war group’s movements.

“It’s a message came from Tiera. The third war group has already moved to intercept. The monsters’ levels are high, and they seem to be moving in a direction which avoids contact with the frontlines.”

The monsters of the ‘Flood’ normally have levels that don’t reach 100 on average. However, the monsters approaching Balmel were a mix of creatures level 200 and greater.

Kaede seemed to be together with Tiera. She seems to have been the one who confirmed the information as it was written in the message.

“It’s more dangerous there, as we expected. We will take charge here. Shin, follow the plan and go over there. ”

“Roger that. I’ll leave this place to you.”

Shin entrusted that place to Hibineko and the others. He started running, while concealing himself with【Hiding】, he also released his power【Limit】.

With a bang sound, he crushed the ground as he sped up. At the same time, he put on the equipment he had prepared for a time like this.

Covering his whole body was a full plated armor of deep crimson which closely resembled samurai armor.

He held a deformed death scythe in his hand decorated with eye-like patterns on the base of the hilt and the blade.

The mood was completely different than a moment ago, as Shin ran at full speed.

As if rejoicing that its turn had come, the death scythe on Shin’s shoulder made a *Gisiri* sound.

◆◆◆◆

“I heard the story, but they really came huh?”

“Many people with a lot of combat experience, like my mother and father, are able to read the flow of battle with just their intuition. It's a sense that I don't understand yet.”

Before their eyes, they saw the monster hordes advancing while mowing down trees in the forest. The number of monsters were so great, that they dyed the earth black. By all rights, these monsters would normally be hostile to each other. Seeing that, Tiera talked about the things that Shin had spoken of and felt that they had come true.

“Kaede-chan, do you know what type of monsters they are and what their levels are?”

“Yes, but even if I disclose it, I am confused by all the various monsters mixed together, and to be frank, there’s no type. Even their lowest exceeds level 200. There are individuals whose levels are 350, which I believe are probably leaders.”

“Thank you. I’m going to contact Shin and Master, so please tell me if there are any changes.”

“Understood.”

Tiera entrusted Kaede to be the lookout and opened a message card. The third war group started to move as they spread out in front of the rampart. Tiera quickly wrote down the information regarding the monsters that she had heard from Kaede and sent it to Shin and Schnee.

In the case that Shin and the others might not be near Tiera and her group, she was told to make contact immediately when the monsters came.

"This will do. Now, I will have to create a diversion until Shin and master come here."

"I will help you."

"Thank you. Though even if I say that, Kaede-chan is stronger than me."

"No, I was taught that power is not everything, and because I also believe that myself, please issue instructions without reservation."

Was it the influence of Shadow and Holly's education? Kaede did not have an arrogant attitude although her stats were superior. It was said that strength is justice, or something like that, but she was free from the arrogance that was occasionally seen in Chosen Ones. On the other hand, Kaede was rather impressed with Tiera's ability to keep up with her with the stats of a normal person. Although Tiera hadn't realized it.

Even though Tiera's stats were low, her abilities, because she had undergone training from Schnee for over 100 years, had already reached the level of an expert. During the escort job, when she had killed a bandit with an arrow, only her elven perception ability and her skill with a bow were required for the task. She had also fought against monsters above level 100 while traveling. Though she herself wasn't aware of it, she had enough power to fight against the captain class of Balmel's knight squadron on equal terms if she made a serious effort. Moreover, she was accompanied by a divine beast.

She was originally an alchemist and now a tamer. Tamers did not excel in physical abilities, and their worth was decided together with their monster partner as a set. Following that logic, Tiera could have been said to be stronger than Kaede.

Kaede was not so foolish as to take such a haughty attitude toward a partner like Tiera.

“When they come a little closer, I’ll shoot the individuals who seem to be the leaders with my bow. After that, I can do nothing but to continue shooting earnestly.”

“Can you aim from here?”

“I’ll be able to, somehow, with my weapon and Kagerou’s assistance. This time Yuzuha-chan is here too. Even if I have the【Far Sight】skill, I don’t feel like I am really needed.”

“That’s not true, someone who is accompanied by a divine beast like you is not bad at all! Tiera-san is also better at handling the bow than the instructor at the training school.”

Another person would probably say “What are you talking about?” to Tiera who was not aware of her own ability. Normally when a person's own ability was low, no matter how much assistance they received, the results would still be low. Since she only started real combat training since leaving Tsuki no Hokora and being around Schnee so much, Tiera had lost any common sense for measuring people’s strength. This gave her a false impression about her own strength.

Moreover, the fact that Gaien and Tsubaki, who had come together during the escort request the other day, also had abilities that didn’t match their levels and ranks, had also contributed to that impression. To make matters worse, for the past several days she had trained on the training grounds, which were only intended for low-rank adventurers who tried to distract themselves from their own anxiety. Because of these strange turns of fate, Tiera was not yet able to properly recognize her own ability.

“Anyone can do this given 100 years, you know?”

“Certainly, it must be so if you say so.”

Tiera Lucent.

A woman who was the personification of the phrase ‘What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’.

“Now, it’s time to go!”

Seeing Tiera ready her bow, Kaede also prepared to use her soul technique.

Answering Kaede’s chant, an emerald-green sphere of light appeared. The attribute of her soul technique was wind. It was an attribute that rivaled many water and earth users among the elves that used soul technique. An emerald-green light sphere was something that visualized the wind’s spirit. A spirit in sphere of light form was the result of a low-leveled soul technique. When the skill level of the soul technique rose, it would take on various figures accordingly.

Kaede had asked for the divine protection of the wind spirit. Because it raised the hit-rate of their long-distance attacks and lowered the hit-rate of the enemy's long-distance attacks, the divine protection was said to be necessary to employ when one is using a bow.

“Divine protection has been applied.”

“Thank you”

Tiera, who concentrated on drawing the bow, thanked in a low voice.

The bow that Tiera was using was not the purely wooden bow that she had been using up until now, and was instead an obviously superior bow with metal incorporated all throughout it. It had been made using a branch of a magical tree that had been said to be over a thousand years old and with mithril, which had a good affinity for magic. The bow itself was charged with a dense magical power. Had the arrows she was using been processed as well? To Kaede, the arrows seemed to absorb the magical power of the bow.

Kagerou and Yuzuha growled next to Tiera, who pulled the bow. At the same time, Tiera herself began to shine as she was clad in purple lighting.

“――! ――――!”

Was she concentrating? Tiera didn’t seemed to notice her own state. She held her breath while drawing the bow so her aim didn’t shift due to breathing.

And, at the same timing as the long-distance attacks by the archers and mages, Tiera released all the power charged in the bow.

“Kya!”

The moment the arrow had been released, strong winds violently circled around Tiera, causing Kaede to raise a small scream. It was the recoil from the magic power that had been focused into one point and then released.

The people who couldn't attack from afar and could only watch Tiera and the others, lost their balance and fell down from the sudden gust. Many of the people who had fallen down hadn't fallen simply because of the wind.

It was because they had seen the spectacle when the bow was released.

“What is that…”

Someone said, but everyone was thinking the same thing.

What had been shot from Tiera’s bow, was it really an ‘arrow’? The display caused them to doubt something even as basic as that.

The arrow shot from the bow had been enveloped in magic power, and it flew several kemels toward the monsters in an instant, leaving a band of light and a flash of purplish lighting.

If Shin had seen this, he would probably say, “it’s a beam”. The arrow was ridiculously fast, as if a light technique system magic skill had been evoked. It went in a straight line, completely disregarding arc trajectory, which was a characteristic of archery, towards the 'Ogre Leader,' one of the monster leaders. When it struck, it scraped the leader and its surrounding off as the purplish lighting spread for several mels around the place where the arrow pierced the ground. Though only one arrow had been shot, the damaged area contained up to a dozen of bodies including the leader.

Monsters like the Ogre Leader that had been hit directly by Tiera's attack were annihilated, leaving behind only their forearms and lower legs as if the space containing their torsos had been erased. The monsters who were the subordinates of the leader saw this and seemed to be terribly confused by the sudden situation.

“Um...Tiera-san, is that bow...”

“Shin lent it to me since I seem able to use it now...but I didn’t hear that so much power would come forth when I shot seriously!”

Judging from Tiera’s tone, it did not seem to have released as much power while she had been practicing. While looking at the bow she held in her hand, her face stiffened.

“F-For the time being, let’s prioritize killing monsters! I think you shouldn’t think too deeply about it!”

“T-That’s right! I’ll question Shin closely about this later; now is the time to suppress the monsters in front of us, right!”

Although Tiera's shooting had decreased the monsters' morale with its bombardment, the number of monsters had hardly changed. When they had settled down, Tiera and Kaede decided to resume attacking.

The surrounding people also pulled themselves together as they saw the two get ready to resume. They started moving to do things they thought they could do.

“Here’s another one”

A single blow like a flash of light was again shot from the bow Tiera held. Like last time, a leader was rent asunder, and unrest ran through the subordinate monsters.

However, even with that much power, if one considered the amount of magic and time needed to concentrate and charge up for the attack, she was not able to rapidly discharge arrows. As a whole, the damage was insignificant when compared to the total number of monsters.

In addition, after several shots, the remaining monsters learned to predict Tiera's attacks and the leaders began to withdraw outside the bow's range. They then directed only the subordinate monsters toward Balmel.

“Ugh, I’m sorry, I need to rest for a while.”

After about 10 arrows, Tiera lowered her bow and sat down.

In terms of power, it was natural that the higher the output, the higher the magic consumption rate would be. Even though it was possible to shoot without using magic, it would be better to wait for her magic to recover when considering efficiency.

While patting Kagerou, who looked at her anxiously, Tiera took out a magic medicine ‘ether’ and put it in her mouth. Tiera swallowed the odorless and faintly sweet liquid, and shifted her eyes toward the battlefield.

Ahead of her gaze, she saw the cavalry unit of Balmel’s third war group cut off the monster hordes while receiving support from the mage unit.

The knight squadron charged into the areas where the monsters were still in turmoil from Tiera’s bombardment. The monsters were unable to resist the assault.

The ones who attacked were the elite of the third war group. During their attack, the monsters were trampled repeatedly without a single loss. If you looked closely, something like a film of light could be seen enveloping the knights and the horses.

Divine magic art【Light of Mercy】. This was one art that Tiera had memorized. It was a personal barrier that absorbed damage from the monsters. Mages and the like often used it to compensate for their low defense. It was learned as a preparation against surprise attack. It was originally a priest’s field of expertise, but it was an art that many people learned regardless of their job. Many of the cavalrymen who returned had lost the film of light. The mage unit cast it again. After all, arts were not as powerful as skills.

“If they get here, then I'll fight too!”

When they got closer, Kaede invoked the soul technique again. Spirits of various sizes flew in the air, and bullets of air that were approximately the size of a soccer ball scattered over the monster hordes.

When these multi-colored balls of air hit their targets, a large amount of smoke was released into the area. Then, the monsters in that area suddenly stopped moving and started to act strange as they began to attack their allies.

“I see, the effect of【Wind of Interference】is amplified by soul technique, right?”

“Yes, though I don't expect it to do any damage, it's ideal for disrupting the enemy.”

【Wind of Interference】was a magic belonging to the middle rank wind technique magic skills. The magic skill involved firing wind bullets that randomly debuffed their targets; it had a high probability of causing an abnormal status, but the damage it dealt was almost zero.

As for why Kaede had chosen to do that, it was because Shadow and Holly, who had experienced large-scale battles in addition to the ‘Flood,’ had taught her to do so. More than direct attacks were needed to be effective when facing numerous opponents at once. Using skills such as poison, paralyze, and confuse was one of the strategies that prevented the other party from demonstrating their strength as a group.

There was a big difference in strength between organized groups who acted together in a systematic way and groups that either were never organized or became disorganized.【Wind of Interference】was used to prevent that from happening.

The monsters, which had been rushing closer, had been disturbed by the chaos occurring inside their group. The monsters that had been paralyzed fell over and were trampled by the monsters behind them. The monsters that had been confused were attacking their allies from the rear. The frontline, which had stood in one straight line, began to shift greatly, forming a gap between the monsters that were still advancing forward and the monsters that were falling behind.

The cavalry unit of Balmel didn’t miss this opportunity, and killed the monsters that had protruded away from the rest of the line in smaller groups.

“That’s the elite of Balmel for you. But…”

“Yes, at this rate, it would be bad.”

The knights’ movements had certainly proven their skill. However in the long run, there was an upper limit in number of enemies that the cavalry unit, the mages unit, and the long-distance attack of the archery unit could defeat. As for not sending the infantry, it was because they knew it was only a matter of time before they would get swallowed by the huge number of monsters.

“Now is the time!”

“Grue!”

Kagerou answered Tiera with a bark. Tiera and Kagerou were standing away from the direction that the monsters that had spawned from the 'Flood' were coming from. Tiera had been posted here to prepare for when the monsters moved into the area where no Chosen Ones had been deployed.

Kagerou was expected to support her if push came to shove.

“Kuu! Kuu!”

“Yuzuha-chan?”

Beside Kagerou, who fixed his eyes on the enemy valiantly, Yuzuha raised its foot and barked. That look seemed to say, “Yuzuha too! Yuzuha too!”

“Okay, I’m counting on Yuzuha-chan too.”

“Ku!”

“Leave it to me!” was what Yuzuha seemed to say with a cheerful bark.

Even though Yuzuha was far from its full strength, Yuzuha’s level surpassed 400, and because its tail had split into three, it was able to use flame technique and lightning technique in addition to divine magic. Its combat power was already by no means inferior to an upper class Chosen One. Yuzuha was more than enough as a battle force.

Kagerou and Yuzuha's backup accounted for nearly half of the power of Tiera's prior bombardment. Even if Tiera possessed many Shin-made items, she was only able to use weapons that were available to the commoner class with her stats, and it would have been a serious problem if she attacked inaccurately with a superior weapon. Her low accuracy would have been the result of her low affinity with both the weapons and the support she was given. To digress, despite her low DEX, she could aim and hit at a target with a bow of high power like the one she held; In general, Tiera's ability didn't depended on her stats.

"Alright! My magic power has been restored, too. I'll reduce the number of enemies a little more."

After her magic power had been sufficiently restored, Tiera aimed her bow at the leaders and began to shoot again.

Her bow's shots, which were impossible to counterattack against because they came from the highest point on the rampart, had a small but steady impact on the groups she attacked.

Meanwhile, an individual clearly different from the other monsters appeared before Tiera's eyes.

Its body was two times bigger than a normal ogre. It had blue skin that was almost black, two crystal-like horns that grew from its head, and grasped a huge ax that was enveloped in dark red aura in its hand.

"That one's kinda big."

"It's not a leader individual. Its name appears to be 'Berserks'. Its level is...I can't see it?!"

Kaede spoke out loud as 『???』 was displayed at the column of its level.

If Kaede, who was a *critical* who could fight against a Chosen One, couldn't see its level, then its level probably exceeded 500.

Away from Kaede, who was shocked, a large amount of magic arts and arrows poured down on Berserks. Even from a distance, the knight squadrons were not as incompetent as to miss the strange atmosphere that Berserks emitted.

The attacks had been strong enough to crush ordinary ogres and Ogre Commanders, but before they could hit, Berserks swung its ax with a tremendous force.

The ax created a windstorm in its wake as it was swung. The wind it generated blew away not only the magic and the arrows, but the monsters nearby as well. Though the attacks, which had been aimed at it had dealt damage to the monsters around it, not even one arrow had reached Berserks' vitals.

While the magic and the arrows had killed many other monsters, Berserks, who had been at the center of the attacks, remained completely unharmed. It walked forward towards Balmel without anything slowing it down.

“What is that!”

“That weapon, I believe it may have the performance close to a magic sword. That Berserks didn’t even flinch from the attack and was able to use the weapon like that.”

“This isn’t the time to be surprised. Kagerou, Yuzuha-chan, lend me your power!”

They had likely sensed that it was not an average opponent. Kagerou and Yuzuha answered by granting their power to Tiera’s bow.

(How about this!!)

The blow, which was charged with more power than previously seen, was then shot towards Berserks.

However, the single arrow that had been heading straight toward the enemy and leaving a trail of light and sundering the air in its wake was, of all the things, intercepted by Berserks' ax.

While letting the aura rise from the axe, Berserks drew a red arc in the air. The swing of the axe, which couldn’t be compared with physical strength of the surrounding ogres and the like, flung aside the arrow which flew toward Berserks.

“Jal!!!”

Berserks raised its voice to psych itself up.

After a moment of resistance, the arrow was deflected from its original trajectory and pierced the ground. Because its trajectory had been diverted almost 90 degrees from its original path, there was no damage due to impact when the shock and the purplish lighting landed.

“No way…”

Tiera was speechless from shock, because the blow that was so fast it hadn’t permitted the monsters to react up until now, had been completely repelled. She hadn't expected to defeat it, but she had expected to at least wound it.

There were no other individuals like it within the whole crowd of monsters. It was possibly the strongest individual among the approaching monster hordes. Judging from the fact that it had appeared only moments ago, it probably had been either kept away from the frontline or had missed the chance to make a surprise attack.

“Kaede-chan, can you do a stronger attack than the one just now?”

“No, I can't do anything stronger than what you just did Tiera-san…”

Tiera had asked Kaede a slight hope, but the latter's answer was not favorable. Even if she combined her magic with Kaede’s soul technique, that seemed problematic.

Now that it had come to this, there was nothing that the knight squadron could do any more.

“!! Tiera-san!! Look!!”

“Wha, that!!”

Tiera, who had thought she had no choice but to depend on Kagerou, returned her gaze toward the battlefield at Kaede’s prompting. She could see the figures of the cavalry unit as they charged toward Berserks.

The monsters around Berserks had been driven back by the rain of magic and arrows. This had temporarily created an open area around

Berserks. A small number of the cavalry unit had advanced straight into that area.

“Maybe, they intend to try something with their highest-level people?”

“Isn’t that just suicide? Kagerou!! Get ready now!! …Kagerou?”

In order to support them immediately, Tiera called out Kagerou. But there was no response.

When Tiera shifted her gaze from the battlefield and looked at Kagerou, he had turned toward a different battlefield. If one looked closely, Yuzuha also looking in the same direction.

“What’s over——!!”

Tiera was going to say “there?”, but before she finished her sentence, she felt a strange sensation that prevented her from speaking.

Something was coming.

Tiera, who had not learned the perception system either as a skill or art, still clearly felt some presence approaching.

“Tiera-san, that…”

Ahead where Kaede was pointing, there was a silhouette charging forward through the crowd of monsters.

It was fast.

At a speed far faster than a horse or a riding beast monster type, that silhouette drew near to the battlefield.

In no time, the silhouette reached the edge of the group, then jumped without pausing. The cloud of dust billowing up, indicated the power of its leap.

“Is that…a knight?”

It was Kaede who muttered, but a lack of confidence could be perceived in those words. It was no wonder. A person jumping over 100 mels while wearing full body armor, was not normal.

However, that was not the only things that surprised her.

Considering the direction of the jump, that person probably intended to face Berserks. Even if one had a marvelous jumping power, they could never reach Berserks who was close to the center of the battlefield. However, that figure of a person jumped even further while in midair.

As expected, the monsters were also astonished by this. Their faces seemed to express bewilderment while the silhouette passed over them as they watched.

Seeing that insane movement, a person's face flashed in Tiera's mind.

A person who was able to do the things that had happened before her eyes.

In fact, there were three people as far as Tiera knew.

Among them, there was only one person who seemed to do these kinds of things, so she tried to call out Yuzuha for confirmation.

“Hey, Yuzuha-chan. Is that by any chance...Shin?”

“Kuu”

A bark seemed to say, “that’s right” was returned.

“Ahh...I see. That’s why Kagerou didn’t move.”

If she looked at Kagerou’s reaction, Kagerou would probably have noticed Shin approaching earlier than Tiera.

It seemed silly that she had become flustered. Though this was not the time to relax, Tiera somehow felt exhausted. It was too bad for the soldiers on top of the rampart, but they would probably have nothing to do anymore.

“Wow, he landed between Berserks and the knights.”

While hearing what seemed like a little excitement from Kaede’s voice, Tiera thought,

(I hope you don’t overdo it...)

◆◆◆◆

While moving into a crowd of monsters, a young soldier had a thought.

He would die here.

Chosen Ones, like Schnee Raizar, could exterminate a crowd of monsters all by themselves.

However, if the mutation class ogre was left unattended, it would reach Balmel before the reinforcements could arrive. Even the tremendously powerful shoots, which had originated from the top of the rampart, had been repelled. Because the defenses inside the castle were weaker than the defenses outside, he didn't know how much damage it would cause if the gate broke.

Therefore, a suicide squad consisting of especially high-levelled troops from the cavalry unit were going in to buy some time.

He was afraid of dying. No matter how long he trained, that was one fear he couldn't overcome. And yet, the young man and the knights riding around him had chosen to fight. Even if they could only delay the monster a little, they believed that it would protect Balmel.

“50 mels until contact with the enemy——!!”

Thanks to their training, they also knew the approximate distance to the target. It was the distance between the young man and death.

Due to the attacks that were released just earlier, there were hardly any monsters between them and the mutation class. Were they afraid of the cavalry's charge? Or were they afraid that the mutation class would attack them? The young man thought it might be the latter.

“20 mels distance!!”

“The monsters around it seem to be looking at something!! Just pay attention to the mutation class!!”

The captain of the suicide squad raised his voice. Because the mutation class looked different from a distance, the moment their eyes drew nearer the knights became intimidated.

Huge.

It was described in just one word.

That body seemed like a giant type monster, such as a Gigantes or a Cyclops, which were only heard of in fairy tales. It was unthinkable that anything could lift it up, but the mutation class lifted the ax high while it was still a distance from them.

“Shit!! Stay clear!! Everyone spread out!!”

The knights responded in unison without anyone falling behind as the captain, who had predicted the danger, shouted.

The young man who was riding a horse also evaded the trajectory of the ax that the mutation class had swung down.

He thought he had dodged it.

“Gu!!”

He had avoided a direct hit. However, the young man fell from his horse because of the aftereffects. He was thrown hard to the ground, and he was about to lose his consciousness from the impact in an instant. But his life would be over if he fainted now, so he desperately held on to his consciousness.

“Kua…”

What entered his dazed sight was the figure of another knight who fell from a horse the same way he had. When he put strength into his body in an effort to stand up, he noticed that his left leg wouldn't move.

“Oh shit…”

He’d probably been blown over together with his favorite horse. When he looked, he saw his leg was caught between the horse and the ground. Though he twisted his leg to pull it out, it didn’t come out.

Then, a shadow fell onto the knight.

“ah…”

When he looked up, there was the mutation class.

There was no sign of intelligence behind its corrupted red eyes. Only the thirst that emitted from its body felt real. It raised its ax using its bulging muscles. There was no time to pull his leg free.

“––––––!!”

He would die in another few seconds.

Even though he understood this, the trembling young man still drew his sword from his waist, and prepared to fight the mutation class.

From the beginning, he was already a dead man. As he endured without raising a scream, he swallowed the dread that filled his heart and glared at the mutation class

The movement of the mutation class was slow.

Actually, there were no changes in the mutation class’ movement. Facing death, the young man's sense of time had accelerated somehow in order to evade the attack.

But, no matter how much his sense of time had hastened, there was nothing he could do anymore. He could only stare at the ax as it slowly approached.

In a few blinks, his favorite horse would be bisected by the mutation class’ ax.

Or so the young man had thought,

Then, he would be next.

––––He was bound to be.

“Owa!!”

It had been too sudden.

Something had descended between the mutation class and the young man.

No, it had fallen.

The impact of the fall caused the ground to shake.

As the cloud of dust cleared, what appeared before the eyes of the stunned young man was a person standing there with full body armor and carrying a distorted-shaped large scythe.

The full-body armor's design was different from the designs he knew. The color it reflected in the sunlight was red --deep, thick cardinal, vivid scarlet, and bright coral. Colored using these different shades of red coupled with a brilliant reflection, the armor looked like a furiously burning flame that had taken the form of a human.

It was ornate with decorations that were placed in various places. By that alone, he understood at a glance that it was made by a skilled craftsman. The more he looked at it, the more he felt the difference of status.

He could perceive unevenness in the scythe which rested on the figure’s shoulder from the lack of uniformity of its blade and shaft. An eye-like pattern had been drawn where the blade met the shaft; it seemed more like a ceremonial weapon rather than one meant for the battlefield. Even so, it looked strangely nice when paired together with the armor.

“………”

As he was entranced by that figure, the young man didn’t say anything. Exposed to the overwhelming power emitted from the figure’s whole body, his body wouldn’t listen to what he desired it to do. Although he also did so when that figure had appeared.

Even though that person’s back was turned, the young man felt the pressure of the overpowering intimidation he received from the mutation class fading.

When the young man looked at the mutation class as they stood directly opposite and facing each other, its movement had stopped while the ax was raised.

Its eyes spread wide open, and even though they were corrupted, they clearly showed the color of fear.

(For such a monster to be overwhelmed!!)

How much power was needed to be able to do that?

Among the Chosen Ones, there were none with a presence like that of the person in armor before his eyes.

Because he was on the brink of death, the intuition of the young man had sharpened to the utmost limit and made him realize something.

The person before him had power equal to Schnee Raizar. And, that person was on his side.

“Are you alright?”

“....Eh?”

He hadn’t gone senile, but momentarily the young man couldn’t comprehend the words directed at him. Judging from the voice, it was likely the man inside the armor.

As he watched, the person who had been facing away from him until just now, moved the fainted and immobile horse, and pulled out the young man’s leg.

“I-I’m saved...hey, b-behind you!!”

Flustered, he got up in a hurry, and when he looked up, the mutation class continued raising the ax.

Now wasn’t the time to help others. The young man cried while pointing to the back. His tone was coarse probably because he was in hurry.

“Hm? Ah, that’s right.”

It was a casual reply.

In the next moment, the man in armor, who should have been in front of him, vanished. Sounds of violence reached the young man’s ear at approximately the same time.

If he were to express it in words, it would probably be something like “BAM!”. Because of the excessive sound, the young man stiffened his body.

It was by luck that he didn’t shut his eyes. Because of that, he saw the source of the sounds.

“..........”

He was silent for a different reason from awhile ago.

In front of him, where the mutation class ogre had been moments before, was the man in armor with his fist extended.

The mutation class monster was nowhere to be seen. But not because it went away.

In front of the swung fist, only the elbow and the ax which the mutation class had earlier raised over its head remained, as the arm dropped.

“Ha, haha…”

The spectacular scene which occurred in front of the young man’s eyes made him lose it.

One blow.

No weapons were used, only pure physical strength.

The body of the mutation class that received the blow burst open and into pieces, some monsters which were bathed in the splattered blood screamed.

Even more than that mass of power the man in armor revealed his thrusted arm, which was covered by a gauntlet, did not even have a scratch.

Now, he couldn’t help but laugh.

“You, what are you….”

“Me? Let see…because of the color of my armor, call me Red.”

——Red, the man who defeated the mutation class and came back without a single drop of blood on him, gave an obviously fake name.

“Well, my name doesn’t matter. More than that, you can leave this place to me, and you all must join the main force.”

“Ah, yes, I thank you for your help. But we are the rag-tag remains of the knights, fighting together with you——”

“No, that won’t do. Rather, I'd be more worried if you stayed close.”

“Worried?”

“When someone is around me, I can’t fully utilize my ability. If possible, withdraw your whole team including the group that used magic back to the rampart.”

“But that is”

“I’m sorry but this is not a suggestion. Besides, anyone of you that draws near untactfully will be killed, you know? This is that kind of weapon.

Do you understand?” Red lifted the scythe on his shoulder to demonstrate.

Close up, it was easy to see the scythe’s size. Just half of its length alone was more than 3 mels, and the blade itself was more than 2 mels. The blade was wide, and something like a zigzag line ran down the center.

The young man felt that the line seemed to be a ‘mouth’. He had a premonition that at any moment, the ‘mouth’ could open and that it would nibble at him.

The young man now understood why Red wanted the entire army to fall back.

That thing was dangerous. It was impossible to fight alongside it. He would be killed by the blade before he could approach Red.

That powerful weapon was built for killing allies as well as enemies.

“That is a cursed weapon…”

“Indeed”

Red replied in a casual voice. Considering the situation, that made him stand out as being a bit odd.

For the residents in this world, there were different kinds of cursed weapons, they were all the same in that they invited destruction. There was a price for using the power of these devilish arms; they led their owners towards death.

Even though this was common knowledge, there was no sign of it seen on Red. Though he had a cursed weapon, which was said to gnaw at sanity and life, both his tone and gestures were very natural.

“Why————”

“Sorry, but no more questions. There’s no time to waste. Someone is coming to pick you up, too.”

Behind the young man, the knights who escaped falling from their horses came to retrieve their friends.

“You are?”

“I’m Red. I’ve already told this knight, but I’m taking charge here. You all have to withdraw.”

“………”

The one who called out to Red was the knight entrusted as the captain of the suicide squad. Unlike the young man, the knight didn’t ask any questions, and only sent a sharp glance toward Red.

“…Understood. We’ll leave it to you. Everyone withdraw at once!! We will join the rear guard unit!!”

After contemplating for several seconds, the knight decided to withdraw. As the only captain in charge, he also quickly to made a decision.

“Captain!?”

“You too, get on the horse quickly! We are withdrawing!”

“Well, but”

“We’ll entrust this place to that person….We'll only get in his way.”

The knight bowed to Red.

"You helped my comrade, we wish to express our gratitude."

"I'm not doing this to be thanked. More than that.."

"Yea, we'll withdraw immediately…I just want to ask one question. Are you, by any chance, Schnee-dono's.."

"I'm the letter of introduction holder."

"…I see. I'm convinced."

The young man who heard the conversation between the two was surprised by this as well. But he understood it at the same time. It was well known that common sense didn't apply to many letter of introduction holders.

The young man mounted the horse that his knight's comrade rode. They left the place together with the captain. Strangely, there were no attacks from the surrounding monsters, either. Their gazes were all directed toward Red, as if the monsters didn't see the young man and his group at all.

After they got about 50 mels away, something like an explosion was heard from the rear.

"!!"

When the young man looked back toward the sound, he saw a spectacular scene where monsters came apart and pieces were blown off into the sky.

Neither sparks nor explosion flames were seen, so it probably wasn't caused by fire magic. Yet, he could understand that the center of the explosion-like sounds would be dreadful.

50 mels. Yes, they were 50 mels away. Still, the distance from the young man to the combat wasn't far enough. The aftereffects of the attack were still approaching.

The horse was already running as fast as it could. His knight comrades probably also felt the danger. He didn't even look back.

"How beautiful…"

The young man could not take his eyes off the scene.

Because his line of sight was higher as he was mounted on a horse, he managed to keep an eye on the center of the attack.

That ghastliness was fully visible.

“Ku!!”

In an instant, a wall of monsters was demolished. It was Red’s attack.

Though they should have been moving farther away, the pressure from the attack felt closer.

The explosions didn’t stop and the area where the monsters’ remains and blood flew to the sky kept getting bigger.

Red, who was barely visible, hadn’t moved at all from the place where he parted from the young man. The armor’s radiance which was bathed in monsters’ blood hadn’t lost its shine. In fact, it seemed to get more fired up in order to flaunt its existence.

Just how many monsters were facing against Red, who was only one person? The young man didn’t know. Numbers were power. No matter how strong one was, he or she would get crushed by the endless surge of monsters sooner or later.

That fact still held true for the Chosen Ones. However, as if the young man's thoughts had been nonsense, Red demonstrated a fierce attack.

Each time the scythe was wielded, it generated a red blade. When the blade passed through the monsters, the monster corpses were torn asunder and blown into pieces. Before the power of that single blow, the monsters’ level, race and physique were insignificant.

The mountain of corpses that should have piled up and become a hindrance were instead blown away by the storm that blew in addition to the generated red blades.

In the young man’s eyes there was little doubt that Red was a calamity.

He didn’t seem to care about the approaching monsters; everything was swallowed by a raging tempest.

Thing like numbers was not a problem.

“That…”

The young man noticed that inside the tempest that pummeled the battlefield was an especially crooked shadow.

His eyes were barely able to distinguish the shape of the scythe that Red held.

The first time the young man saw it, he was certain there was only one blade. But now, the number of blades had increased to two.

No, it had always been two blades. The young man remembered the ‘mouth’, the line that ran through the blade. It seemed that the blade had split in two along the line, from top to bottom, and had taken on the appearance of a huge mandible.

“Did it… eat them?”

The separated blades ate the monsters’ flesh and blood. The mysterious way it appeared to seek blood added to the strangeness and haunted the young man’s mind.

Earlier the young man had observed the eye like drawing at the base of the blade. Now, the eye was shining brilliantly while emitting a dark purple color. It seemed to give off the impression that it was alive with a will of its own. He was certain that there was nothing holy or pure about that will.

A person observing the occasionally blinking shine, would feel that the scythe was rejoicing in the slaughter.

It was immediately obvious that this was a cursed weapon.

Though normally bizarre equipment tended to attract the most attention, the most abnormal thing wasn’t the equipment but the one who used it.

The fact that Red himself could continue fighting calmly while utilizing that equipment was the most abnormal part.

While the destruction spread in what could only be described as a massacre, no aspect of the attacks were wasteful or inefficient.

He wasn't just using the power of the weapon. His swings perfectly matched its performance. His technique allowed a single powerful blow to fall on the monsters and then without delay, lead into the next blow. The recoil from the first blow wasn't wasted but was instead used to connect with and initiate the next blow.

Though great martial arts sometimes felt like a dance, Red's movements also had something close to that. As for the monster hordes, they looked like prearranged harmony as they were seen being knocked down.

It was a performance by the blazing red armor and the distorted scythe.

It was like Red was inside and outside of the storm area, a fixed space extended around him.

"………"

A distance from the monster hordes, the knights who had watched from the beginning were dumbstruck and simply stared in amazement as they forgot to guard. Unlike the young man who saw it up close, they simply didn't know how to react to the absurd and unbelievable display.

The change that happened as Red swung the scythe was dramatic.

Some of the monsters who should have been heading for Balmel suddenly turned around and began to return. In addition, the monsters in the surrounding areas also turned around one after another.

It was the captain of the third war group who noticed how the monsters had changed directions and were heading toward the red dyed storm that was blowing violently in the same direction.

The range of effect had surpassed 100 mels and gradually continued to expand.

Won't we also get swallowed by that at this rate? He was anxious about its vast range.

The number of monsters were decreasing at a frightening rate. The storm of destruction kept widening.

It was as if the monsters were voluntarily jumping into the burning flames.

Consuming the monsters' lives, the scythe's ferocious power kept increasing.

◆◆◆◆

Standing at the top of the rampart, Tiera and Kaede realized that almost all of the monsters in the battlefield were gathering around Shin.

Was it the effect of the armor, or the scythe? When seen from above, the monsters facing Shin seemed to be following something that was lit dimly red. It seemed to draw the monsters.

The effective range of the effect was wide. There was no way to describe it otherwise.

The number of monsters could still be called a black wave. The range of the effect was so large that even monsters far enough away that mel units would be too small to measure the distance, were all affected by it.

“...What is that?”

“It’s not the enemy, so it’s all right. Well, even if I say that I feel relieved to see that, though it may not sound convincing.”

“Well, um, is that an ally?”

“Yes, that’s correct. It’s no surprise that he’s coming here.”

Having Tiera reassure her, Kaede too relaxed her hands which were tightly clenched to her staff.

Though Tiera knew its true identity, judging from Kaede’s reaction to that mystery person, she would probably be frightened of it. Though that person still fought against the monsters, there was no guarantee that their blade wouldn’t be pointed at them.

The power that was displayed before Kaede's eyes far surpassed the limits of the upper class Chosen Ones in this world.

It was certain that it fell within the domain of the ‘Special Beings’ like Schnee and Girard.

“Not even half of the monsters remain.”

Though Kaede hadn’t noticed because she was only focused on Shin’s existence, only about one-third of the original number of monsters remained. It was visible from the top of the rampart, the view that was only covered by monsters was no longer there.

“Ah!”

In the Kaede’s field of vision, as she able to see the whole view, something strange was displayed.

In a few words, it was a floating sphere.

By comparing it to the surrounding monsters, the size could be calculated to be two mels in diameter.

Brown and purple were mixed on its surface, and various eyes were attached.

There were eyes just like a human’s eye, pupils like a cat’s eye with vertical slits, compound eyes like an insect and full black eyeballs under an eyelid.

Those various eye sizes ranged from one cemel to dozens of cemels, and it observed the surroundings.

And then, suddenly some of that eyes directed their gaze towards Kaede.

“Uhh!”

Surprised, Kaede tried to look away. A sharp and throbbing pain struck her head. It was a pain like she had never experienced before. She couldn’t endure it and was forced to her knees.

Her view turned dark in an instant, nevertheless, her consciousness didn't fade away.

Despite having almost no feeling in her body, she had a horrify sense that something was trying to enter inside her. Only pain could be felt clearly though.

"a…Ug…."

"Eh! what's wrong!?"

Tiera was surprised by the change. It was looking like it was only a matter of time before the monsters were defeated but, Kaede had suddenly began to groan in pain.

"Kaede-chan! Kaede-chan!"

Kaede looked like she was about to collapse at any moment, Tiera immediately hugged her closely and supported her

Thereupon, the groaning Kaede entrusted her body to Tiera as she lost her strength. Visibly large drops of sweats appeared on her forehead.

"Eh…?"

"Kaede-chan? Can you hear me?"

She was likely to have lost consciousness momentarily. Tiera muttered while wondering what happened and looking after Kaede. Without knowing why, Tiera felt weak as if her strength slipped out from her body.

(This feeling, what it is I wonder…)

Kaede's mind was free in the midst of the present war. There was a big fight until here. While her physical condition may be unusual, she regained consciousness.

After Kaede wiped her sweat, she thanked Tiera and stood up.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm already fine. There is a strange monster in the battlefield, come to think of it, it had some eyes and I suddenly got headache."

"I wonder if it's an attack using the mind system? Anyway, I'm glad you didn't acquire an abnormal state."

Though Tiera couldn't read most of the information on Kaede's stats due to the differences in their levels, she could see any indications of a bad status.

After confirming that there were no such indications, Tiera let Kaede rest and directed her eyes toward the battlefield.

What Tiera's saw was a scene where the monster which exactly imitated a sphere, was cut in two by the red scythe.

During that time, Tiera was being observed by Yuzuha.

Yuzuha witnessed Tiera's body radiate a faint light while holding Kaede which completely dispelled the black haze that had coiled around her.

"Kuu"

Yuzuha barked in a volume where no one heard except itself.

Afterward, Yuzuha stared at Tiera until the war ended, trying to see through the existence named Tiera.

◆◆◆◆

While attracting many people, Shin, also known as Red, swung the scythe he held in his hand.

After his speech, he waited for the knights to withdraw. Afterwards, he simply ran wild.

Once he beat Berserks, the strongest monster so far, to death the job became a simple routine as he expected.

"But…"

A small complaint leaked out.

Because things that he didn't expect were taking place.

"Good grief, a real cursed weapon can't help but to be noisy can it?"

It wasn’t that noisy when he started to fight, but as he utilized the ability of the scythe and killed monsters, voices began to echoing in Shin’s head.

The explanation note for the scythe hinted that it affected the mind. This was likely because it kept repeating the word “KILL, KILL”.

The scythe that Shin was using was called『Scythe of Soul Eating』.

One of its abilities was to concentrate the hatred of the monsters solely towards the user. The more monsters it killed, the more damage it caused and the larger the effective range became. Furthermore, a portion of the damage generated was returned to the user. However, while cursed equipment did enhance ability, this was always in exchange for more risk.

And as cursed weapons go, the『Scythe of Soul Eating』surpassed the risk of other cursed equipment

The area within the range to collect the hate, the attack range rose together with the high increased rate of damage. A reason a portion of the damage was converted into HP was that it made it possible for a solo player to battle against groups. In city defense events against monsters, nearly half of the monsters would be attracted to and attacked by the player who was equipped with this weapon.

The downside was that the user’s stats were constantly decreasing by 65%, magic couldn’t be used, and it was impossible to recover HP excluding the scythe’s ability. In addition, it seemed to attract magical attacks by allies. It had more disadvantages than advantages. Furthermore, cursed equipment always include bad status effects for the mind system.

Needless to say within range of the weapon, there was no distinction between friend or foe. It was the kind of equipment that would consume 100% of any allies who fought near it.

Because the rate of decline was only reduced to 50% even if the equipment was strengthened, death was still inevitable. All the players using it died in the event.

Since coming to this world, Shin had strengthened it using his technique and made it usable by reducing the stat reduction rate to 30%.

Moreover, since Shin's entire body was covered in an armor called the 『Holy Flame Series』, this weakened the effect of the cursed equipment. He could even use magic and recover HP to some extent.

When it comes down to it, he didn't have to worry about the disadvantages. He should be able to fight without a problem.

However, when the number of monsters killed reached around 500, the aforementioned voice began to affect Shin's mind.

Even an upper class Chosen One hearing that voice, would have had to battle to maintain sanity. The voice that assaulted the mind was making progress on Shin.

"Ahh, this is bothersome"

Though he said that, Shin was far from falling insane. The effect was only enough to hinder his mood.

"I didn't notice when I tried it out, but there is endless flowing voice in this subtly audible volume. It's ANNOYING!!"

Was it because he raised his voice? The monsters were blown away by an extra 20 percent.

At this point the cursed equipment could do no more than annoy Shin.

The people observing, could never have dreamed that Shin would be saying things like that from within the center of the storm.

"It's time for you to come out…"

After deciding to ignore the cursed voice, Shin directed his gaze to the surroundings again.

Because he was now encountering strengthened monsters, he determined that a commander type monster like the Raid Vice was nearby. Knowing that, soon it would be caught in his net.

Using the『Scythe of Soul Eating』was an efficient way to reduce the number of enemies, other than the inherent problems with using cursed weapons.

Unlike with normal attacks, because the enemy hatred was focused on the user, it was literally impossible to miss the enemy.

It was even possible to make the monsters that had already headed toward Balmel return.

As the range of the scythe expanded, it was even possible to draw the monster commander towards him.

The commander was lurking in the shadows of another monster. Because it took awhile to see the opponent clearly, Shin didn't know where it was. Therefore, he used a strategy that would draw it out forcibly.

"...Found you!"

In an area where monsters were crowded together and the individuals couldn't be distinguished, there was a reaction that was different from the others in Shin's perception range. Due to the monsters being pulled toward Shin, that area seemed to be less crowded.

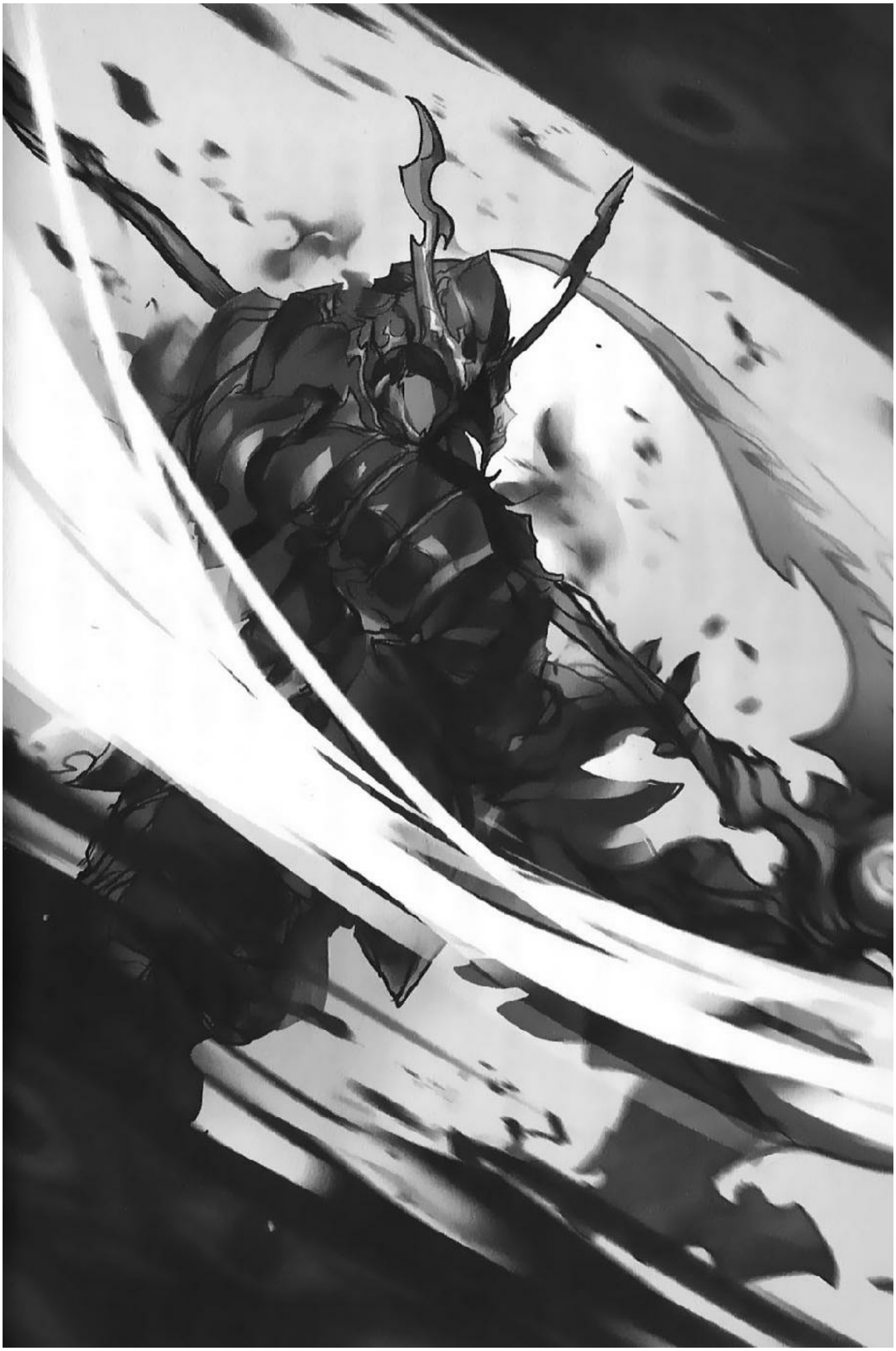
Before the eyes of the murmuring Shin, there appeared a monster with globe-like appearance which had a large number of eyes.

It was a monster which Shin was familiar with. A Viscount class demon which were often seen at events where monsters attacked cities. Apparently, demons had resumed full-scale activities.

However, they were unlucky this time. It was classified as low-class demon, so it couldn't stand a single blow from Shin.

Was there a last-ditch effort? Its eyes, which faced towards Shin, flashed all at once. This was normally used to induce an abnormal mental state, but had no effect on Shin.

"That will never work on me!!"



With a single blow that contained all the piled up stress, Shin cut the demon in two. The demon disappeared leaving something like a gem and jewel.

Was it because the demon had been the leader? Though the monsters came at Shin until their last, when they were finally exterminated not a single additional blow had landed on Shin.

When he contacted Schnee, she said there were a few more on the other side.

While disappearing with Hiding, Shin returned to his original position to be with Hibineko and the rest.

Without any incidents from there on, the ‘Large Flood’ came to the end.

Severely wounded people appeared among the knights who fought against the monsters. It was a bit far in the future, but the residents were excited over the fact that it was the first time in Balmel history of the ‘Flood’ that no one had died.

Chapter 3

“Ahh, I want to return...”

In the carriage that was heading toward Lord Taul’s castle, Shin sighed.

It has been several days since the ‘Large Flood’. The investigation of the periphery, the monsters’ raw material extraction and their corpses removal and so on, were mostly over. Shin and the others received an invitation.

Apparently after each ‘Flood’, A party was held and the person who had the most distinguished achievements would be awarded. It was said that they wanted all the Chosen Ones to come too.

After the war ended, Shin was asked to stay for awhile. He agreed because he intended to help with the removal work. Their idea of “stay” though seemed to be different from what Shin envisioned.

“That’s my line.”

Next to Shin was a gloomy looking Tiera. She was not a Chosen One, but many soldiers had witnessed her figure shooting the monsters from the top of the rampart. So it was natural that she was asked to attend as well.

Though they tried to refuse because they claimed to be too busy with work, the people who they were working with shot down the excuses by saying “We’re good here, so go”

For the residents of Balmel, it was unthinkable that someone who had achieved so much for them and who deserved a medal of honor for their service would go without receiving proper thanks, or so they said.

“Because everyone who told me to go ahead had great smiles, I couldn’t decline.”

“You too?”

Since they all said it with such good will, she found it impossible to refuse. Shin was in the same boat so he understood what she meant.

"Shin's achievements were reported by the knight squadron, right? The people living here, do that without fail."

"That doesn't mean that this is going to be a formal ceremony. If you worry about it too much, you'll just tire yourself out."

"Think about being able to eat food for free. Just like a noble's party, no suspicious envious guys should approach you."

Schnee, Shadow and Holly, who had experienced this kind of party before, tried to reassure them. Hibineko didn't express it in words but he also wanted to say the same thing.

"I've just never been to a ceremony like this before, you know?"

"Well, there's no time like the present to get used to this then. We have been through this a few times. It's better if you get used to this now while you're still young. It might prove useful in the future."

Though Hibineko said that, there would hardly be a ceremony like this in real life, Shin thought. On the other hand, he was already committed and could no longer back out since he'd come this far already. He decided to just accept his fate. Just in case, he lightly re-checked his attire to make sure he wasn't looking scruffy.

As for what Shin wore, it was a Kalkia's formal suit, the same clothes he wore when he went to Bayreuth's royal castle. After removing the dirt, it was in mint condition.

As for Tiera sitting next to him, she wore a bright green dress. Her black hair was gathered together at the back of her head and she had put on light make-up. The combination made her beauty look even more polished. For her one-piece dress, a section from her shoulder to her upper arms was cut out and the skirt was longer on the right side than on the left. It was an asymmetrical type dress. It fit tightly around her waist, which accentuated the thinness of Tiera's waist. The only thing wrong with the outfit was the person wearing it, because she had drooping shoulders and a depressed expression.

Even though she seemed distressed, she still looked amazing. If someone had announced that she was the princess of a country, nobody would doubt it.

Holly and Shadow who were sitting in front of them, wore a white dress and a black suit. It was indeed the proper attire for a ceremony. Holly's dress was a long type skirt that was called a mermaid type dress. A strap on her left shoulder held a gem that emitted a blue glow which emphasize its presence. With a dress that is showing more body lines than Tiera's, Holly's good sense of style stood out. Shadow who was perfectly dressed in his suit, didn't stand a chance.

Though Hibineko also wore a suit, he gave off a slightly comical impression due to the nature of his physique. However, it was clear, that he was used to wearing a suit. Like Shin, he typically didn't feel the need to dress up in clothes like this, but in such a place, at such a time, his experience meant that he was comfortable dressed up.

That said, the most radiant one there was Schnee. Since it was widely known that Schnee Raizar rarely participated in events like this, she was attending as Yuki, Shin's fiancée.

As part of her disguise, her hair had been changed from silver to gold and her eyes had been changed from blue to red. Because the skill she used prevented her from being noticed when she used it on herself, that level of disguise was sufficient.

Her hair which was lightly tied behind her head was held in place by an ornamental hairpin. The hairpin included a red jewel to match her new eye color. The white dress she wore boldly exposed her back from her shoulders to her waist.

Since the dress was designed to tighten the cloth under her arms, her chest was strongly emphasized. Because Schnee's breasts were already naturally large this attracted the gaze of groups of males even though it was not a low-cut dress.

However, the color of the dress combined with Schnee's natural demeanor didn't reflect a feeling of excessive sex appeal. The neat look in combination with her allure, instead made her an enchanting figure who exuded charm.

Schnee was already a beautiful woman to begin with, but her beauty rose by one more rank when she dressed-up. Seeing her like this for the first time, Shin was charmed by her.

"Both Tiera-san and Schnee-san are wearing dresses. The dresses that you two are wearing, are they traditional dress for elves or something?"

"Eh? Oh, I just borrowed this dress. Is the design unusual?"

"They're pretty rare. I've studied clothing a lot on my own because I think I'd like to do clothes-related work. Most of them are very similar designs for some reason."

Kaede was an elf brought up in Balmel. She didn't know what clothing styles might be normal at the elves' garden well.

Though Holly was a High Elf too, she might not have such knowledges due to her being a former player.

What Holly owned was made by players, but Kaede seeing the dresses of various designs seemed to be fascinated by them. Kaede herself was wearing a simple yellow one-piece dress. It matched Kaede's character and created a good atmosphere as well.

While they were talking, the carriage passed through the gate. They were near the destination. Inside the carriage, was Shin, Schnee, Tiera, the Kurosawa family and the two animals, Yuzuha and Kagerou. Kagerou was as usual inside Tiera's shadow. Yuzuha was also at its usual position, on top of Shin's head.

Because there would be many adventurers attending the party too, the dress code seemed fairly flexible, with many different kinds of attire as evidence. There were also many who seemed to recognize that Shin was an upper class Chosen One too.

Before long, the carriage stopped.

If one looked at the front near Holly and Shadow, Hibineko could be seen taking Kaede’s hand. Mimicking Hibineko, Shin also held out his hand to help Schnee get off the carriage. Though he’d often seen things like this in movies, no one was aware of how very embarrassed Shin was to do it for real.

“Young lady, please give me your hand. Or something like that..”

“Fufu, thank you very much.”

Did Schnee want to play along? She took Shin’s hand while smiling wryly.

Was it because similar scenes were unfolded around them? Shin seemed to be able to speak the lines smoothly now.

“Now the next young lady as well.”

“How should I say this, it doesn’t seem to suit you.”

“Don’t say that!”

Unlike Schnee, Tiera’s held her mouth to keep herself from laughing.

When everyone had descended, they went to the assembly hall.

“Will you escort me too?”

“If you are fine with me.”

Schnee causally linked her arm with Shin. Then the other arm was also being pulled.

Of course, it was Tiera.

“Are you really going to make me go alone? Since your other arm is available too, let me use it as well, okay?”

“Is it alright?”

“Because Tiera and I are both pretending to be your fiancée today, isn’t it fine?”

"You are blessed by two beautiful women, you know? Might as well enjoy it."

Because both Schnee and Tiera were in unusually good moods, Shin stopped talking about it. There was no need to be a downer.

"Amazing!"

"As expected, it's different when actually seeing it."

Many participants had already arrived at the party hall. Though everyone had dressed up, it was interesting to be able to know who was an adventurer and who was not.

"There are various impressions at the party held by nobles."

"That's how it is, huh?"

Though he only knew about noble's parties and such from movies and anime, Schnee seemed to be used to it, perhaps that's to be expected.

There were many people who paid attention to new arrivals as they appeared one after the other. When Shadow and Holly appeared, the watchers focused their attention on the two. Hibineko and Kaede got similar treatment when they appeared following them.

"...Uu, they're watching us!!"

"Well, I guess so."

"Shin is the center of attention, right?"

"While you say that, I feel that most of the attention went to Schnee and Tiera though.."

The ratio of attention was 50% on Schnee, 30% on Tiera, 10% on Shin and 10% on Yuzuha. Furthermore, the eyes glaring at Shin were mostly the envious eyes of the men.

(The mood was darker than the time in the guild.)

Shin had experienced what was called the "I ENVY this bastard!" stare in the guild, in some respects it was a neat feeling. He was feeling a large amount of the same kind of feeling again coiling around him.

Besides the eyes of jealousy, though it was not much, he was able to feel the eyes of respect and observation. His achievements in the battlefield would be helpful proof for the time being.

It was only natural that most of the attention was directed towards Schnee. If Shin had been in their shoes, it was certain that he would have reacted the same way.

While leaving her left arm entwined with Shin's right arm, she swayed in a way that matched her walking; It seemed to be like a mother leading a child or something to that effect. Compared to the somewhat awkward Shin, she didn't mind the gazes at all and behaved gracefully.

Unlike Schee, it seemed that all the attention was difficult for Tiera. Tiera clung to Shin's arm, as she shrank away from the crowd's gaze. The situation wasn't comfortable for her because she was still not very good with crowds of people. At first, her eyes sparkled as she showed great interest in the new surroundings when they were initially entering the hall, but now her eyes had become dull with discomfort.

While trying to ignore the happy sensation touching his arm, Shin walked in a way that shielded Tiera from the eyes of male group observers. Schnee too cooperated with Shadow and Holly by making a wall, as they walked toward to the hall.

Then, they noticed a commotion which seemed to be happening at the entrance of the hall.

From the discussions they heard around them, they learned that Rionne had entered the party hall.

Even though the party had a large attendance and many invited guests, due to the hall being wide enough, from where they were standing they could just about identify Rionne's presence through the gap in the crowd. Rionne was dressed in a crimson dress with her hair tied up in a knot at the back of her head leaving a free length of her hair hanging down. She advanced through the hall with the dignified pace of royalty.

"Hmm?"

Shin watching Rionne, had a feeling that she had glanced over at him for a moment. Having an unpleasant premonition, he pulled Schnee and Tiera's arm and began to move away.

"Shin?"

"Eh, what's the matter, Shin?"

"It's the second princess of Bayreuth. You know, the one who was transferred with me.."

"So? You don't need to run away."

"…Shin, did something happen between you and her?"

Tiera wasn't feeling any need to move replied to Shin's words, and Schnee paused for a moment before asking Shin a question.

"Ahh…well, she was very interested in things like『Kakura』and my magic and other things. The talk of engagement in order to make me attached to the country seeming very…possible. Because of that, the 'approach' which I wasn't sure was serious or joking…happened."

Schnee still seemed to be smiling but, Shin felt a slightly overpowering feeling from her. Eye's swimming, without any hesitation, he confessed all things that happened during their journey. His arm was then pulled as if she wouldn't ever let it go, and a very happy sensation surged on his right arm.

He was absolutely baffled about what kind of expression he should be making right then.

"She had 'approached' you, right?"

"No, of course I refuse her, for real!?"

And then, Rionne's presence approached while they having such an exchange. Shin's vain struggle seemed only up to here.

"It's been a long time, Shin. Why did you run away after making eye contact?"

When Shin turned around to look at the source of the voice, he saw Rionne standing there with a nice smile on her face.

Rionne talked to Shin casually. In the same manner as during their journey from Kalkia. Since she had put aside her royal behavior, her friendliness had increased as well.

Shin hadn't seen her clearly from the glimpse through the crowd. A close up view though, revealed that Rionne's dress exposed more bare skin than Schnee and Tiera. Her back and shoulders were completely exposed, while in the front she showed a deep cleavage, there was also a deep slit in her skirt. Was she aware of the change? The gallant and somewhat manly appearance she wore while on the battlefield was completely gone. Instead she was now displaying the feminine appeal of a woman.

"My companion isn't very good with crowds. Being around Rionne-sama would simply attract too much attention."

"Muu! Why are you talking to me like a stranger, Shin?"

"Because we're being watched from all sides after all."

While having a hard time not to stare at her cleavage and the slit in her skirt, Shin looked at Rionne's eyes when he spoke.

'Can a princess be over-familiar in a public place?' He also included the meaning when he said so.

"I don't mind it."

"Play along."

'Forgive me' should be written on Shin's face.

Did she read that? Rionne shrugged her shoulders as if to say it couldn't be helped.

"Well, it's fine. We can only have empty conversations out here anyway. Putting that aside, shouldn't you introduce the two flowers on both of your arms? Oh, as you've probably heard from Shin, I'm Rionne Strail Bayreuth. I'm the second princess of Bayreuth Kingdom."

Rionne seemed to be interested in Schnee and Tiera who were on Shin's right and left side, because her gaze kept shifting left to right.

"Pardon my rudeness. These are my fiancée's, on my right is Yuki and on my left is Tiera."

To forestall any awkward questions, because it would have seemed odd if only Schnee was called fiancée but both women were hanging off his arms, they decided earlier that both of them would be identified as fiancées.

"It's my first time meeting you. I am called Yuki."

"Um, a-and I'm Tiera Lucent"

Schnee introduce herself gracefully, but Tiera's tone was strained due to her nervousness. When the word fiancée was spoken, Rionne narrowed her eyes a little.

"I'd heard that you had a fiancée, but I didn't expect that she's an elf. Well, if it's a man like Shin, it's natural isn't it?"

"Well, a lot of things happened."

While Rionne had been surprised that they were elves, she quickly returned to normal. She nodded as if she understood immediately.

(In this world, is polygamy considered normal for an upper class Chosen One?)

Even if Rionne had been surprised that his fiancées were elves, she didn't seem surprised at the fact he had two fiancées. As far as Shin knew, none of his acquaintances had multiple wives. Still, his knowledge of the world was still too small to be of much use as a reference.

"They made it here pretty quickly. They had originally been in Bayreuth, weren't they?"

"I can't go into details but there are methods to travel quickly."

"Ho, Shin surely surrounds himself with interesting people. I want Shin to become my country's exclusive asset after all. Of course, I'll be willing to pay."

Rionne change her posture in order to make Shin more conscious of her own assets.

“Well, that————”

“That won’t be possible. Rionne-sama.”

Shin who saw in Rionne, the eyes of the hunter aimed for their prey, looked for some way to decline without being rude or impolite. However, Shin was interrupted by Schnee who stepped forward.

“What do you mean by that?”

“If Rionne-sama saw a portion of Shin’s power, I think you can understand why it’s impossible without me having to express it in words, right?”

Though Schnee and Rionne were smiling at each other, Shin thought he saw sparks flying between them.

As the abrupt situation unfolded, Shin was barely able to keep his poker face.

“Well er, Yuki..san?”

“If you’ve seen his power, I think you would want it more, right?”

“But, that is for Shin to decide. Besides, did you hear the strange story that happened between us?”

Shin’s comment was ignored.

Apparently, neither one was willing to give up when the topic was related to engagement.

Shin could only watch the exchange between Schnee and Rionne. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do in this situation.

“Yuki-san and Rionne-sama, how about we shelve this for now? Because this is a party to celebrate victory, it’s not really a suitable place for this kind of discussion.”

While glaring at each other with smiling faces, the one who skillfully separated the two was Tiera.

Where did the cowering Tiera go? With her back straight and a faint smile, she seemed completely unlike the normal Tiera.

"Yes. Tiera is right. I am sorry, Rionne-sama."

"No, I was also being impolite in front of the fiancées. Please forgive me."

At Tiera's words, which carried a sense of authority, the two pulled back the dangerous air they were emitting.

"Well then, there are people here I still need to greet. I have to do it before it's too late. Let's meet again later"

Though the party hadn't really started yet, there seemed to be lots of people she still had to say hello to as her royal duty. In addition to the adventurers who had achieved victory in the war, many of Balmel's nobility and wealthy merchants like Berett were also attending. There were many other people running around trying to make connections like Rionne.

"Um, Tiera?"

"What?"

"No well… because your moods were somewhat different from usual. Well that's good. I'm at fault, but you save me the trouble."

"Not really, it's not a big deal. Now, let's go eat a lot of delicious food!"

"You are..right. Enjoy yourself huh?"

Tiera who had a vague lonely expression on her face, gave out a small sigh in order to get over something. However, that was immediately dismissed with cheerfulness as she turned her attention to the lined up foods.

Though Shin was worried about her state, he hesitated to mention it here. He replied to her as natural as possible.

"Oh, it's the appearance of the organizer, huh?"

In a timely manner, Taul appeared.

After the speech where he mentioned how glad he was that there were few casualties and that the war ended safely, voices for a toast echoed.

After that, the party hall became filled with sound and tumult. Everyone seemed to enjoy the party in their own way.

Elgin and other captains who participated in the war came over to where Shin and his party were gathered to greet them. Though they had invited them over to the knight squadron, they seemed to think it was natural that the invitation was declined. The invitation was simply a formality they had to make as a matter of course.

When the busy Elgin left for a round of courtesy calls, Guile came over next.

“Yo! You also co...Shin, come here for a bit”

Contrary to the Shin’s expectation that this should have been a casual greeting, Guile beckoned with his hand and took him aside. Since the two adventurers had both trained together, they were already on quite friendly terms.

“Oioi! Who are those two beauties? They are clearly on another level from the other women around here.”

“Ah, how should I say this, they’re my wife candidates?”

“What...do...you...say? Uh, Shin, how on earth did you get two elven beauties?! Teach me! No, please teach me!!”

Guile asked for a guidance after having stiffened with “I couldn’t believe it” expression. His expression changed completely. The last part was a little strange for his tone.

“Well... First you make a party together. After you’ve proven that you’re a reliable partner, you can then give her nice presents. It’s also effective if you devote yourself wholeheartedly to protect her in a pinch.”

While worrying that Guile was about to have a nervous breakdown, Shin enumerated the methods to raised favorability from the support characters in the game. Because he wasn’t particularly confident that the methods he used in the game would be effective here, he didn't emphasize it too strongly.

"I understand about helping her in a pinch but that would be a problem if there's no pinch at the very beginning. Then, it will be the presents, huh? Do they have to be expensive?"

"You've got it. I think it's alright if the present is something plant related for now. Then, she would probably be pleased with a precious stone which sometimes falls near the big tree. Wait, do you like elves that much?"

Shin asked Guile. Since he was so curious about elf-related information, Shin thought that perhaps there was already a woman he was aiming for.

"Yea, to tell you the truth, there is an elf woman I've wanted to get closer to for some time. The problem is that elves coming out from the garden are very wary. Even though I'm a Chosen One, I've only been able to watch her from afar."

"Is that so? Well, good luck."

"Yea. I'll introduce you sometime."

"I look forward it....Hey, where are you going?"

Guile had a look of determination on his face as he moved to leave the party hall. Was he going to search for a present right away?

Shin thought this might be a bad idea, so he stopped him. Leaving less than 30 minutes after the special victory celebration started, wouldn't be good, even for a Chosen One.

"Geez, this guy is always the same, when he finds something he's interested in, his character completely changes."

Careless of his hairstyle, Liege gripped Guile's head and pulled it towards her. Though Guile resisted, he was just a mage and wasn't a match for a magic swordswoman like Liege.

“Really? I guess I’ve changed too. Did you make the round of courtesy calls over there as well?”

“More or less, you know I don’t like all this formal stuff.”

What Liege displayed was a splendid iron claw, such an action was unbefitting of the figure that dressed in a deep red dress that attracted the neighboring eyes. More than Rionne, Liege’s strength was her voluptuousness.

“Even so, Shin is accompanied by some wonderful beauties too isn’t he? It made me lose some self-confidence as a woman”

“Well, anyone who see’s them say the same things, because it’s the truth!”

After they were called beautiful, Shin agreed without a hint of modesty.

“It’s a pretty refreshing feeling, when you put it that way.”

“I agree with that. But let me go!”

Guile escaped from Liege’s grasp and stood up. Because his head had been tightly gripped, his hairstyle was ruined.

“If I hadn’t grabbed you, you’d have tried to go home. There are still more places we have to go and people we need to greet. Let’s go!”

“Damn this animal strength! Let me go!”

While having an exchange like that between siblings, Liege waved her hand lightly and disappeared together with Guile in the crowd.

After that, many people continued to meet Shin. When the time was right, he moved to the terrace together with Schnee and Tiera. Though there were still many who wanted to meet them, they excused themselves and took a break.

“*Sigh* I’m tired. And this is only for being a Chosen One.”

“If it becomes known that you’re also a letter of introduction holder, there will be many more as well.”

“If it comes to that, I’ll escape.”

“Though as a Chosen One, you exposed the letter of introduction by yourself. Things will still be fine even if you don’t reveal the letter of introduction, right?”

“Argh, I-It is certainly better to just be a Chosen One…but I didn’t think that the guild would notify everyone so quickly.”

Besides the problems on how to prove himself, his knowledge about the term Chosen One were limited. After a long time, Shin thought whether or not revealing himself as a letter of introduction holder was hasty, but the damage has been done.

“Well it’s fine I guess. Since they’re Barlux-san’s acquaintances, it’s unlikely that they’ll leak the information easily. For the time being everything is good, because the city is safe once more.”

Even Shin wasn’t perfect.

They put aside the difficult discussion and decided to enjoy the rest of the party.

Side Story

It was the time when THE NEW GATE was still a peaceful VRMMO.

One of the bases called Alloride was crowded with players and NPCs.

On the main street where stores that were placed side by side, made of wood, stone, metal and other raw materials that didn’t exist in the real world, a couple; in this case a man and woman were walking.

The man, who had black hair and black pupils wore a black long coat with matching black trousers. Except for the red armguards and the red leg guards, his appearance was almost entirely black. Though it was downtown, he was armed with a katana at his waist.

In contrast to the man in black, the woman was dressed in a colorful manner.

Her light brown hair was fashioned into twin tails which reached her back. Her blue eyes, which gave the impression of a blue sky, were looking at the man. Her skirt had a yellow checkered pattern and she also wore a white blouse with navy blue cloth accents. A short red mantle cover from her back to her shoulders. She let it float in the wind.

The man’s name was Shin, and the woman’s name was Marino.

“Hey, Marino. Though I said I’d follow you, how about telling me where you want to go?”

Shin hadn’t been informed of their destination. Therefore, he asked Marino, who was cheerfully walking in front, where they were going.

“It’s just a little farther, be patient.”

Where the two were heading was a shop that had been recommended to Marino.

“Let’s look for a secret famous shop”——It was brought up into their conversation about one week earlier.

Marino, who had a vast network of friends immediately found one of the shops. Ever since she had become a regular customer, she now talked about it incessantly.

“The bar manager is a nice person, every time I go to his bar, I end up talking to him for hours. How should I say this? He really fits the part of a bar manager who works in a coffee shop. Isn’t that what you want? Just like what you might find in a manga or a novel, he’s someone who gives off the impression of a dandy uncle who can be relied on. Although his appearance is a bit comical..”

Apparently, their destination was the coffee shop.

Many MMORPG’s had transitioned to VR. THE NEW GATE which Shin and Marino played was no exception. The conversion to VR allowed the players to move their avatars around like real bodies. Previously, avatars were viewed in third-person with the player viewpoint being from the back of the avatar, so the realism and reality from VR was overwhelmingly more popular with players.

One of the biggest changes was that the sense of taste had been reproduced. In the past, they could only enjoy the atmosphere, but now there were various food products that were sold with the collaboration of a food company.

In addition, there were many customers who come by for food just like in a real coffee shop. Because one couldn’t gain weight no matter how many sweets they ate, there was a rumor that many people had their meal portions increased in the game.

While not true of Marino, Shin wasn’t the sort who would have conversations in a real coffee shop, so he wasn’t really inclined to do it in a net game either.

So, why did he go this time? Only because the person who asked him to was Marino.

In the game, the two people were lovers.

“Ah look! You’ll see it when we turn at that corner there.”

Shin shifted his gaze ahead to where the spirited Marino had pointed.

Shin, who had memorized almost all Alloride's maps, noticed that a road with little pedestrian traffic branched off from the main street. Certainly, he agreed that this road had all the atmosphere require for a famous hidden shop.

However, Shin started to have doubts before turning at the corner, when he noticed the signboard that he saw earlier.

"Hey, I can see the signboard from here, but only paws and small fishes were drawn on it. Is it a coffee shop where you get to play with cats or dogs?"

'It actually exists', Shin imagined a shop where healing is the main theme.

"No it's not. The bar manager is a beast of the cat race. That's why the signboard is like that. Ah, by the way, it's not a small fish drawn with the paw, it's a small dried sardine."

Marino gave off a "What are you talking about?" vibe, leaving Shin with mixed feelings.

The name of the shop was 'Nyan Da Land'. As for that naming, Shin certainly felt it fit a more cat-like vibe rather than animal-like. However, it was not without thinking 'It should have been easy to understand'. Especially the small dried sardines.

"It's because he's a cat, huh? Y~eah, like I would have known that."

Couldn't they have used an image of a cat? While puzzling over this, Shin followed Marino through the door of the coffee shop.

"Welcome! Oh, if isn't it Mari-nyaa?"

"Hello Hibineko-san. I've brought the lover whom I had mentioned before"

"Oh, then you must be Shin-kun?"

Hibineko looked at Shin. Their conversation showed that the relationship between the owner and the Marino was something more than what you’d normally find between a shopkeeper and customer.

Hibineko’s low pitched voice echoed through Shin’s ears. Shin wasn’t worried about what was said. On the other hand the possibility of writhing to the sombre baritone voice was high.

However, Shin focused on the nickname “Mari-nyaa” used by Hibineko for Marino.

“Mari…nyaa?”

“Hmm, that was one of the informal word endings that were established by my guild the ‘Cat Type Tribe Word Ending Research Society’. When you want to indicate respect and affection, ‘-nyaa’ is attached to the partner’s name. Don’t worry, ‘-nyaa’ isn’t something intended to be used casually like at a first meeting.”

“Sounds like you’re part of an amazing guild, huh? Um, may I call you Hibineko-san?”

Though Marino was calling the catman, “Hibineko”, what Shin saw displayed using【Analyze】was ‘Nekomata@Rising’.

“‘Hibineko’ has been attached to this avatar, huh? I’m delighted when you call me so.”

The cat type avatar lowered his head, there was coloring of black ears at the white fur. However, a portion of his face was gray for some reason, the white and gray boundary line looked like a crack on a concrete.

Hibineko, a cracked cat? It was an amazingly well made avatar, Shin felt it was amusing and a little amazing at the same time. Because it was rare in the game, it was possible that he liked to do things that amazed others.

“Then let’s decide what to order first.”

The two sat on the chairs after the self-introduction ended. It was a famous hidden shop so there were few customers inside, each of them having fun chatting.

“There's a large menu here. The recommended items are the shakes. The choices are strawberry, white peach, and black sesame in yogurt. By the way, I recommend the black grape shake.”

“Is there coffee or tea behind the counter?”

Shin who thought one of those was definitely her favorite, asked Marino while glancing behind the counter.

“Everything over there is quite good. There are no bad choices.”

Marino commented that everything there were first-class goods. It wasn’t just that it tasted good, the food acted as a power up in a way that was more effective than the half-assed products sold over the counter in a normal shop.

“Then without further ado, I’ll take what Marino recommended, the black grape shake.”

“I’ve decided too. Master, two black grapes shakes.”

Not even five minutes passed after Marino ordered before Hibineko brought the shakes, which had been poured into glasses.

Because a chef could shorten the food preparation time for a certain number of dishes, it didn’t even take a minute of time for the actual food preparation.

To make things seem more realistic, a certain amount of time was waited.

“Thank you for waiting. Here are the black grape shakes you ordered.”

“It’s here!”

“Then without delay——”

Shin tasted the shakes that had arrived. With an icy cold feeling, the sourness and the sweet taste of the grapes spread inside his mouth. Even though it was in game, it was a taste he could honestly say was delicious.

The admiring Shin saw that the icons which indicate DEX and INT on his stats bar had risen. Though the rate of increase was lower than from a buff from a mage, it was an increase that surpassed that which was typical given by food.

“This is amazing! Do you have a version for take out?”

“I’d rather keep this between a few close friends. It’s a business, but I’m not doing this for profits.”

When Shin asked with a voice that wasn’t strange coming from a major guild, Hibineko answered with a troubled face.

Among the gamers, there were people who want to seriously take in what they do.

For such people, they might not be interested to fight for the no. 1 either.

“I see. Well, I have a chef acquaintance I know, so I thought I wanted to see her reaction when she drinks this.”

Shin who tried to guess at what was going on inside Hibineko’s head, explained why.

“If that’s the case, I’ll prepare one for you to take with you. I wonder what her impression will be?”

“Really! Thank you very much”

Hibineko seemed to be interested in the other’s chef’s reaction. He converted the shake into a card and handed it to Shin.

“That’s Cook-san isn’t it? I don’t appreciate it when you talk about other girls in front of your lover.”

Although Shin was happy for a moment because he had obtained something rare, Marino who had been watching the exchange between the two, glared at Shin.

“M-My bad, Marino. It’s only because the shake you recommended was so wonderful. It was unintentional, okay?”

Shin, clasping both hands together to apologize. Marino nodded with a pose that suggested “It couldn’t be helped.”.

“Oh well, I also thought to take some to Cook-san, so it’s fine. It’s not like you can do this in the real world after all.”

Marino was used to the change that came over Shin when he was exposed to unusual items and equipment. It was like his eye color changed.

“So Shin, you need to find a good shop for me next time.”

“I’ll look for it, but don’t expect too much.”

Shin frowned at her reply. Armour and weapons shops were one thing, he didn’t have a clue about finding a shop with a playful name like ‘Nyan Da Land’.

Shin was relieved though because he knew it meant she wasn’t in a bad mood.

“Then, what kind of tale will you tell us today? I never get tired of hearing Shin’s stories.”

“I’m not sure what you mean, I’ve talked plenty about my black history in the past. I want to hear some stories about Marino’s failures in the past too.”

“To want to hear a girl’s shameful story…Shin is pervert.”

“Wa!? You, stop retorting like that, alright?!”

It was an exchange that seemed more like the bickering of two bad friends than between two lovers. In reality, they knew that they were just joking with each other. It just showed that they were happy together.

Even though they didn’t speak of anything consequential that day, Shin and Marino still enjoyed their conversation.

“Ah, sorry, I have to go soon.”

While she was speaking with Shin and Hibiniko, Marino was keeping track of the time displayed in the digital display on the edge of her view. When her time was up, she mentioned she had to leave.

“Hm? It’s that time already, huh? It’s always hard to believe that the time passes so quickly.”

Marino had told him that she had a time limit to her net gaming and had no choice but to leave the conversation.

“See you later! Please find me a good shop by the day after tomorrow.”

After getting up and telling him that, she left the shop and then logged out. She’d mentioned that she wouldn’t be able to log in tomorrow due to circumstance with her family.

“Now, what should I do? I don’t really know of any good coffee shops.”

After Marino left, Shin was feeling some despair. In fact, he didn’t have a clue regarding where to look for an appealing shop.

“...maybe I should ask her for some help?”

Shin muttered, while thinking about his guildmate chef.

◆◆◆◆

“Have you found a good shop?”

“More or less. Since I don’t know as much about this topic as you do, you might already know about it.”

Two days later. Shin and Marino visited a player hub named Ametora.

Shin was passionate about the things he liked and his favorite activities. Marino on the other hand was quick to gather information about things that were cute, fashionable and stylish instead.

Shin mentioned that he’d asked someone for help, because he expected that Marino probably already knew about this shop.

“Look. It’s that shop. What was written on the signboard seems to be the abbreviation of ‘Black & White’.”

Shin pointed at the signboard, which had ‘B&W’ drawn on it.

“Hmmm I see. I think you’ve made a pretty good choice.”

With a tone that seemed joking, Marino nodded in agreement. Seeing that response, Shin had a “She had known after all” bitter look on his face.

“I wonder if Hibineko-san was the source of your information?”

“Wrong. Though it is someone you know too.”

“When Shin says it’s the person I know too…Cook-san?”

“You discovered that rather quickly…”

“Well, there aren’t many chefs that we’re both acquainted with, right?”

Shin knew plenty of people involved with the production of weapons and armor, he had many blacksmiths acquaintances, in addition to alchemists and leather-smiths. However, that wasn’t the reason that he only knew a few chef acquaintances.

For Marino who knew Shin’s friends to some extent, it was easy for her to make a guess like that.

“I feel like I’m being seen through more than ever.”

“You should increase your friends.”

“Are you saying I don’t have many friends??”

Shin exclaimed. Marino put her hand on his shoulder to comfort him. They seemed to say many terrible things, but neither face showed any malice.

Though a friend might say they were having a comedy couples dialogue, it was their usual mode of communication.

“Welcome!”

As the two entered the shop, they were greeted by a woman who had a white hair and transparent blue eyes. Her hair was loose and wavy and gently shook in a wind.

“Holly-san, hello.”

Marino called out the name of the shop assistant who had welcomed them with a smile as she said hello.

“Ara, if it isn’t Marino-chan? Long time no see. Oh? What, are you going with a man today?”

“Tee-hee, he’s actually my boyfriend.”

With a slight grin, Holly spoke to Marino in a teasing way. However, Marino declared it clearly without being perturbed. Her expression revealed her happiness.

“Oh oh dear my, that’s good, that’s very good. I’ll give you a discount today. Dear! Can you come here for a moment?”

“...What? You are being a bit loud, you know?”

Seeming to have heard two voices making a racket, a frowning man came out from the depths of the shop.

Before the two women replied, Shin who saw that man’s face, spoke his name.

“Eh? Shadow-san?”

“Hm? If it isn’t Shin? It’s rare for you to come to a cafe. And together with a woman too.”

“Ahh, yeah, that’s right. Well um, she’s Marino, my girlfriend.”

“Long time no see”

“Fumu, both of you, it’s been a long time.”

Shadow said with a smile.

“You know Shadow-san too?”

Shin asked Marino.

“I know him because I had known this shop, but what about you, Shin?”

“I joined together with Shadow-san in a PvP event. It was an impromptu party we made where he fought with me side by side. He is happy when I call him a real ninja.”

When an avatar's movement was unusual, it became famous among some players. There was a rumor among players that the operating abilities of a player who didn't depend on the system were high.

"What Happy?! Being eager to perform, you increased my Status Troll-kun" (T/N: Status in this case was Shadow's standing as an individual, mostly likely he didn't want to stand out.)

"Guwaa"

Shin being Shin, he was famous for a different reason than Shadow.

"Oh boy, it's because you have a strange way of speaking."

"Ku, I can't deny that...."

Shin hung his head down at Marino's comment.

Holly watched the exchange between Shin and Shadow, though she didn't say anything, she seemed to be withholding her laughter.

"Then, how about we end this talk for the moment and order something? Coming to a coffee house, I don't admire people staying without ordering anything, you know?"

Because they would only block the entrance standing there, Shadow urged them on as Shin was getting hit by the verbal attacks. Shin and Marino ordered a set of drinks and snacks and took a seat.

"What do you say? It's also good to be like that, don't you think?"

"What is it?"

"Mou! you're dense. I mean Shadow-san and Holly-san's matter. The two of them manage a shop together, isn't it pretty wonderful?"

Her voice seemed to contain a lot of admiration for them. Holly accepted orders from the customers while Shadow prepared the dishes and drinks like in a real store. Marino watched their movements as they worked with each other in perfect harmony.

"Well, those two in real life are also...wait, do you know, Marino? The things about these two people."

“Of course. Shin also knew that, right?”

It was a taboo to speak about another player’s real life except oneself in a net. Shin who confirmed it just to make sure, and Marino returned “Of course”.

What the two confirmed each other without expressing it in words, it was about Shadow and Holly being a married couple in the real world. It was not the fictitious net-only relationship. They were a genuine one, two people that could reach out to each other even in reality, Marino has been longing for it.

“When I watch those people who are in love, astonishment comes first more than jealousy.”

“Isn’t that nice, Shin? I was able to meet you after waiting so long. It’s only natural thinking that you’d like to have that feeling forever.”

“Well that too, even I could empathize.”

When the act of love was shown in public, the person seeing it ended up feeling tired.

While holding such impressions, Shin turned his attention to the menu again.

◆◆◆◆

“Shall we form a party and go to a dungeon?”

Four days later after he went to the ‘B&W’, Shin received an invitation mail.

Though Shin was surprised by the mail which came abruptly. He had no problem with his schedule or reason to decline so he replied “Got it.”.

“(Then, there are five of us, you and me, Hibineko-san, Shadow-san and Holly-san. I’ll prepare a meal portion for Shin.)”

“(I’m thankful for that. So, should I offer to do their equipment?)”

“(Um, that would be helpful.. I think.)”

Voice chat could be used between players. Using that function, Shin confirmed the members and the location. Shin heard Marino speaking in an uncertain sounding voice.

Shin had learnt the details of the dungeon's whereabouts from Marino's alter ego in the game. He was aware that the dungeon was far beyond what Marino's avatar can handle.

Marino’s current avatar had just finished her first reincarnation. With Marino’s current level, when you factored in the quality of her equipment and the low bonus for reincarnation, level 300 monsters would be the most suitable for her.

The problem was that, the field-type dungeon which was selected as their destination had monsters that averaged level 400. Marino’s current level meant she could be instantly killed by these monsters even at the dungeon entrance. It was clear that she was lacking ability.

Shin only knew Shadow’s ability. He confirmed that Holly and Hibineko didn’t have a problem with it.

In other words, Marino was simply a burden. If she made a single mistake, the possibility of dying and returning alone were high.

“(But I never thought it was such a high-level dungeon…)”

“(Because you are always with me, they probably thought you were a high rank player too. Since you often meet with Hibineko-san and Holly-san, didn’t you guys talk about it?)”

“(We hardly discussed capturing dungeon. And I usually asked for advice from Holly-san as we’re both are women.)”

“(Oh well, that’s just how you are.)”

It wasn’t unusual for them to chat meaninglessly like this avatar to avatar. Most people seemed to have fun discussing things that way in MMOs.

“(Well that’s fine I guess. Though I’d be angry if someone I didn’t know suddenly proposed this. Marino is not the kind to think that way.)”

“(Mu! I feel like I'm being made fun of somehow.)”

“(Definitely not. Isn't there something more reasonable than power-leveling, Marino?)”

In case of Marino’s character, was she being modest? She was going to discuss changing the destination with Shadow and Holly. They wouldn’t be offended by the request.

He wasn’t sure about Hibineko, but after talking with him, Shin felt he had the same kind of good personality as Shadow and Holly. He couldn’t help to think there was some kind of meaning behind Marino’s desire to intentionally go to a high-level dungeon.

“(Actually, the reason is that you can see the amazingly beautiful scenery in this dungeon field)”

According to Marino, there was a place where elaborate graphics could be seen. Screen shot images of what players saw there had been uploaded to a bulletin board. It seemed that Marino really wants to see it for herself.

“Is that so? Well I understand. Then, I’m willing to cooperate.”

As they chatted, the face of Shin’s avatar expressed a broad smile to show Marino he agreed.

From the beginning, he didn’t think that Marino was interested in power-leveling. Shin mostly focused on reinforcing his arms and raising his abilities. Her play-style was completely different. Of course, Shin didn’t dislike the way Marino enjoyed things.

“Then, let’s choose your equipment right now. With your stats, the best equipment to use is ‘Poisonous Viper’s Skin Mantle’, ‘Dagger of Decomposition’ and ‘Black Lily Boots’.”

As they had finished chatting, Shin met Marino at Alloride and handed over the equipment he had chosen and brought from the warehouse.

"T-They have good performance, but they're strange looking and their names are frightening! No one would wear this equipment!"

Most equipment with sinister sounding names will also give off a sinister impression. Marino who wore them while displaying a doubtful face, screamed at the design.

"Ha ha ha. I'm just kidding."

While laughing unnaturally, Shin collected the items from Marino.

The items that Shin removed would have certainly improve Marino's ability as a tamer. The problem was they looked like something an evil magician or a terrible monster abusing tamer would wear.

"Then, here is my favorite equipment."

"Mou! ...you're mean."

Marino glared at him with a sulky face. Shin looked back at her with a smirk, as he laughed with a "nyonyo".

"Muu!"

"Hey! Sorry, Sorry!"

Marino who was pouting because of Shin's expression, attacked Shin with the equipment that she had just received. Though there was no damage, Shin quickly admitted defeat.

"That is forbidden!"

"Well you see, it's the truth that guys want to be mean to the girl he likes."

"...I'm not going to be fooled."

"Marino-san, you were swayed just now, weren't you?"

Shin noticed that Marino's movement had became awkward.

"Mou! It's forbidden after all! For-bi-d-den!"

Shin teased Marino who waved her fist while being embarrassed.

The two people arguing sounded nice and warm, as warm looks were sent from their surroundings.

The day after Marino’s equipment had been decided. Shin and his party traveled through a mountain and forest area as they came to the field-type dungeon ‘Sacred Mountain of the Morning Star’.

The party consisted of 5 people; Shin, Marino, Hibineko, Shadow, and Holly. At Marino’s feet was a young Wolf-Type monster or ‘Mini-Rufu’, which was her partner. It was sitting in standby mode. His name was ‘Pochitama’. Although his appearance was that of a puppy, Marino said that he had a cat-like character.

With a prototype katana『Gengetsu』pulled out from his waist, Shin said.

“Well then, shall we go?”

“I-I’ll do my best!”

Marino who was anxious about her level, shouted as if she did not want to become a burden.

“I look forward to the scenery from the mountaintop.”

“Such an adventure isn’t bad either.”

“You’re just itching to put your skills to use.”

Holly and Shadow also readied their weapons. Shadow looked like a Ninja. By wearing the ‘Ninja outfit of the Twilight’ he really looked the part. He wore ‘Dagger of Twilight’ on his waist.

Holly was standing next to him wearing the fluffy seeming ‘Robe of Soul Cloth’. The ‘Short Stick of Light’ was sticking out of the robe.

Hibineko who looked like a bartender, dressed in ‘Cat of Wonder’ outfit. His arms were equipped with clawed dragon arms called ‘Misty Hound’. Though they seemed the same, they were both a weapon and a guard which were classified as medium rank of《Mythology》grade.

As for Shin, he was wearing《Ancient》grade equipment in addition to his《Ancient》grade weapon,『Gengetsu』.

Marino was only equipped with《Unique》grade equipment so, she was little out of place.

"…Still, I think it's better for you to spend time on raising your level a little more."

"She should do what she wants. I am particular about this, but couldn't refuse because Marino was looking forward this."

"That's right. Shin-kun and Marino-chan seemed to look forward to this. I say this just in case, but you mustn't neglect the real world."

"I know. If I get addicted to the game and shut myself off, I would get beaten by my parents."

Once when his grades fell, Shin almost had his internet canceled. Recalling that, he showed a "Gimme a break" expression.

"You don't understand. That what is called the parental love."

"Indeed. Too much of anything is not good."

"Ugh…That make my ears burn."

Shin who had stepped into the territory of an addicted person, couldn't argue against Hibineko and Shadow.

Anyway, after being scolded by his parents, Shin played with emphasizing on efficiency. It was an ironic story, as that boosted Shin's strength in a strange way.

"Come on, lets talks about this later. The enemy is here!"

"Woops! It seems so."

With Hibineko's single phrase, everyone turned their attention to the surroundings.

The road Shin and the party walking on, was surrounded by dense forest. The visibility was poor because of the dim forest and they couldn't check the other side of the trees.

Normally, this wasn't a situation where they could talk comfortably as they watched for a surprise attack. However, with Shin who could be called an all-around type, Hibineko who was good at solo fights, and Shadow whose main job was Shinobi, on the lookout, they wouldn't allow an enemy to approach so easily.

"Three from the right, two from the left."

After reporting that, Shadow disappeared. A Shinobi's main power was basically the surprise attack. Though it was a battle that played around with speed as he showed up occasionally, Shadow was better at surprise attacks.

As for the others, because only Shin and Hibineko were adequate for their levels, they served as backup in case additional monsters came.

"Roger that. Hibineko-san, I'll go for the right."

"Umu, then I'll take charge of the left."

Shin said, while noting the approaching presences. Behind where Shin and Hibineko readied their weapons, Holly also prepared to invoke a magic skill immediately.

"I'm counting on you, Pochitama"

"Woof!"

Though she understood that she wouldn't have a turn, Marino held her whip, and prompted her partner, Pochitama to be wary. He seemed to have already sensed that an enemy was close. Pochitama let out a small roar and crouched, in order to be able to spring upon the enemy at any time.

"Here it comes!"

Several seconds after Shin shouted, monsters jumped out one after another from the gap between the trees.

The first to appear were three monsters who came out from the right side of their view.

They were ‘Red Boartaurus’. These monsters had a boar’s head combined with a human lower body. Though they only wore loincloths, their bodies were entirely covered in crimson bristles. Their arms, which were as thick as logs, grasped huge battle axes more than 2 mels high. Their eyes, which peered out between thick and sharp tusks, were staring straight at Shin and the others.

Several seconds after the Red Boartaurus appeared, two ant-type monsters called ‘Mana-Ant Searchers’ came out from the left side. With bluish-white shells, they had three pairs of shiny compound eyes that were evenly spaced on their faces.

Making a “Kacha Kacha” noise with their tusks, the Red Boartaurus turned their heads left and right as they were comparing Shin and the others by sight.

“Uh, it’s the Searcher!”

“No time to waste. Hibineko-san. I’ll support you, so please finish them quickly.”

“Understood!”

Monsters who had gained the name “Searcher”, could call in a large number of companions if they weren’t defeated quickly. Any player who had become strong within THE NEW GATE, knew that from experience.

Holly waited for Hibineko to attack the Mana-Ant Searchers to attract their attention, before she invoked her magic skill.

“【Thunder Arrow】 in three seconds!”

After hearing Holly’s voice, Hibineko attacked while calculating the time. In two seconds, Hibineko jumped, at the same time he escaped from the line of fire of the【Thunder Arrow】, he disappeared from the Mana-Ant Searchers’ view.

By giving the two monsters equal damage, the Mana-Ant Searchers’ attention completely went to Hibineko. As the two Mana-Ant Searchers looked up at Hibineko who jumped, Holly shot lightning technique type magic skill【Thunder Arrow】 three times.

The lightning technique type magic skill gave the abnormal effect 'Paralyze' that restrict the movement of the opponents. Its effect was fully demonstrated this time, as the Mana-Ant Searchers' movement became stiff.

At this time, Hibineko who had jumped, extend both of his arms before he landed. Because he jumped before the Mana-Ant Searcher's heads were hit by the rays, Hibineko crushed the two heads in one attack.

The swoop dive after the great jump was a barehanded technique martial arts skill 【High & Low】. It was a jump used together with other players that attack with magic or a bow, as well as being a skill used when pursuing. Among the players, this was one of the orthodox combinations of play.

The Mana-Ant Searchers' HP, whose heads were destroyed, became 0, they turned into polygons and scattered.

Before confirming the item drops and the EXP, Hibineko turned his face toward Shin. While Hibineko and Holly were keeping the Mana-Ant Searchers occupied, Shin was facing against the Red Boartaurus. As he was also trying to put the katana prototype to the test, he dodged the enemy's battle ax with a sidestep, and started to attack.

Shin had invested primarily on increasing『Gengetsu's』range of attack, a red translucent blade extended from the tip of the katana, and its range became about 3 times its original.

One-handed weapons which had this kind range, without using a skill, were quite rare. However, every time he attacked with『Gengetsu』, Shin's MP had decreased a little. Because MP was being used in a normal attack, the reduction of MP decreases the number of times skills can be used, and the use of things like recovery items would increase. This would become a burden in a battle.

However, if you looked at the power and the suppression force that bisected two of the Red Boartaurus who were in line with the slash, it was a trifling compensation.

“Look here!”

Just as Shin was about to attack the last Red Boartaurus, Marino’s whip was snapped. And then, the slashing attack that Shin unleashed, cut the body in two. With the skill that was strengthened by 『Gengetsu’s』 ability, even the objects behind the Red Boartaurus were destroyed.

“Good timing! Nice assist!”

Though Marino’s attack didn’t seem to have an effect, Shin evaluated the points to her follow-up movement. Shin gave a thumbs up and praised Marino.

“Uu, it wasn’t effective at all.”

“It would be like that considering Marino’s stats. Besides, today’s opponents are hand-to-hand combat type. They are strong in physical attack.”

Shin spoke to cheer Marino who was depressed.

The level of the Red Boartaurus were higher than the average monsters that appear in the ‘Sacred Mountain of the Morning Star’, higher than 501. In addition, as a close combat type, its movement wouldn’t stop at the little damage. It was only natural that Marino’s attack lack power.

“Is it over for now?”

“It is safe now, no enemy approaching.”

Shadow who had watched the surroundings appeared and answered Shin’s question. After the items were collected, the party decided to advance ahead.

“My level rose by 5 levels!”

“There’s a huge gap for the level and stats. Because we are in a party, even if the experience points are distributed to some extent, you’ll receive experience points fairly as compensation”

To Marino who was surprised to see her status screen, Shin said it was only natural. Since she wasn’t only just looking, and attacked for real, compensation applies to the amount of experience she received. (T/L Note: Compensation here means that she receives more if she participates in a fight vs just sitting and power leveling.)

“Then, let’s head forward.”

With Shin and Hibineko in the lead, the party walked forward. When they had walked for about 30 minutes and a few more battle afterwards, the road started to be inclined.

“I think we have entered the mountains.”

“Indeed, according to the information that I collected, the type of monsters that appear will change.”

While walking on the narrowing path of the mountain, Hibineko shared information with Shin.

There were two types that they should be cautious of.

The snake type monster that was good at surprise attacks, ‘Stare Viper’, and the bird type monster that attacks in mid air using the trees as blind spots, ‘Farlop’.

After they had compared the information they had with each other, Shin muttered with a stumped face.

“But this is too much…”

“Well, the number is considerably different from the story I heard.”

As he could sense many reactions from【Sign Perception】, Hibineko agreed while twiddling with his whiskers.

While the range【Sign Perception】could detect was wide, it could also detect wild animal and players in addition to monsters. But to Shin and the others, they just need to watch the markers displayed on the map, to see whether it was a monster or not.

However, that was not the case this time. In the rugged terrain of the mountain, the markers that were displayed didn’t slowdown as they were moving on the field at a fixed speed. Their movement weren’t affected by the terrain. For this to be possible, only the flight monsters could enable such movements.

As Shin was paying attention, he confirmed with 【Search】 that the markers were monsters as they came closer.

"Um, what do you mean?"

"The number of monsters is a bit higher than what I heard. They shouldn't be the monsters that are coming out in a group.

Did she heard them talking? Shin explained the situation to Marino who seemed to be perplexed.

"Wouldn't this make it impossible to climb?"

"No, this is all right. At worse, I will knock them down and clean everything off. And see if we could go around it."

To Marino with a worried face, Shin returned with an indifferent attitude. This was not an exaggeration or a bluff, it was possible when making full use of Shin's skills and stats. It was a simple fact.

"If Shin-kun is here, there will be no problem in that area. Marino-chan, aren't you feeling relieved?"

"Ah, yes."

Holly, who didn't show much enthusiasm, smiled as Marino felt at ease.

"By the way, Hibineko-san. Doesn't this feel like a hidden quest being generated?"

From the mass outbreak of the monsters, Shin brought up the possibility that came to mind.

"Well, there's that possibility. But, I have not heard that kind of quest in this neighborhood."

"Then, it's an undiscovered quest, huh?"

"Maybe, but our goal is different this time. Stop that excited face."

"Nope, *tehee*"

In THE NEW GATE, there were a lot of hidden quests that were still unknown to the players.

It was one of the pleasures of the players to discover them, Shin too without exception had a big grin on his face due to the unexpected situation.

“There’s a lot in the sky, but only a few monsters on the ground. Would you like to go the place I observed from?”

Shadow who had disappeared due to scouting out the area, showed up from inside the forest to ask Shin.

“Is that so? I think we can go if the cave we ought to enter on the way is not found. And I have a feeling that I saw them flying lower than the mountaintop. I think Shadow’s idea is good, don’t you think?”

While seeing Farlops flying through the forest, Shin suggested.

“Fumu, it seems it’s just as Shin say it. Mari-nyaa, how about you?”

“Um, I also think Shadow’s plan is good. If this is no good, there will be another day. I’ll leave the judgement to everyone.”

Marino who was asked by Hibineko, nodded while saying that.

“It’s decided. Then shall we move?”

When the plan was decided, Shadow disappeared again, he went ahead to investigate the situation.

Shin and the rest were also watching the surroundings, and moved forward through the mountain road.

In less than 20 minutes. The number of trees gradually decreased, it became impossible to hide themselves.

“I saw the entrance. It was on the other side.”

Shadow who went ahead revealed himself, and told Shin and the others that he had discovered the entrance of the cave.

While following Shadow, 30 mels before the end of the forest, the cave’s entrance was visible.

“We would be found by the enemy like this. Should we apply 【Hiding】?”

“That would be good. The flight type monsters have good sight.”

Shadow agreed to Shin’s proposal. When Shin looked behind, Hibineko and Holly also nodded.

“Eh? Pochitama isn’t here”

Marino’s voice reached Shin’s ears just as he about to activate the skill.

“Hm? Hey, look! That!”

Marino’s raised voice that pointed in front of Shin, there was the figure of Pochitama running in the opposite direction to the cave.

“I didn’t give any instructions though…”

“Oh dear! Did he pay too much attention to the sky?”

When moving to a dungeon, one must be aware of the enemy after all. Monster partners shouldn’t act without permission, and because Pochitama was an ally, he was not covered by Shin and the others’ watch.

“This is bad, we’ve been found. I’ll be the decoy, please catch him in the meantime.”

Shin saw multiple signs were aiming at Pochitama, and he jumped out from the forest. While Shin runs to the cave, he faces the Farlops that dive down.

“Eat this!!”

From the tip of the stretched-out hand, bullets of light continuously shot out. However, the light bullets heading in a straight line were avoided by the Farlops by slightly changing their descending trajectory.

“Too naive.”

The light bullets that should have lost its target, suddenly changed trajectory direction midair. The light bullets that had been heading toward the sky, attacked the back of the Farlops while drawing the character “く”.

“Light technique type magic skill【Ray Stinger】!”

The light-balls that were bestowed with homing ability, fully demonstrate Shin’s enhanced magic power. The light bullets moved in the air freely, and penetrated several Farlops.

With polygons falling from the sky, Shin directed his gaze to Marino and the others.

The skill that could direct the enemy’s hatred toward oneself were ineffective when the monsters already started to attack. A few Farlops were already heading down towards Marino and the others.

“At this time, there’s no way to earn all the hatred.”

Shin muttered alone as he swung the『Gengetsu』. With the sound that cut the air, he invoked【Blade Pass】.

“Strike them all!”

Above Marino and the others who ran toward Pochitama, multiple red slashing lines flew. For attacks, outside of Shin’s perception range, the Farlops who were diving down were bisected before they could reach Marino and the others.

“I caught him!”

While rain of polygons poured down, Marino caught Pochitama. Marino held Pochitama in her arms, but that didn’t stop him from barking continuously toward the front.

“What’s the matter, Pochitama?”

“Judging from his reaction, he probably trying to inform us there’s something on the other side, don’t you think?”

Shadow said to Marino who was perplexed at Pochitama’s behavior. While watching the surroundings, Hibineko and Holly also conveyed the same opinion.

“Apparently, there is something in the shade of that rock.”

Hibineko who was looking at the direction where Pochitama barked, noticed there was a response other than the Farlops.

The interception of the Farlops was left to Shin, Marino and the other stealthily looked at the back of the rock that blocked their view.

“Is that the Stare Viper?”

Blue and green scales undulated. It was a big snake, Stare Viper, that has a span of 7 mels. And something was encircled by that gigantic body. Because its body was in the way, Marino and the others couldn’t see what was in the center.

“That seems to be the cause. At this chance, let’s kill it.”

“I’ve the same feeling. It’ll be boring to retreat here.”

“Ho-nyaa and Shado-nyaa are really fired up, huh? Then, I’ll also help. Mari-nyaa, you hide here.”

“Got it. Be careful.”

As Marino’s support from the back was received, the three jumped out from the shade of the rock. While Holly chanted, Shadow’s presence was erased and Hibineko flew straight from the front.

“It’s level 500. That’s quite a high-level.”

【Analyze】revealed the level of Stare Viper, Hibineko waves his fist upfront while admiring it.

By movement system martial arts skill【Shukuchi】, the Stare Viper couldn’t react to Hibineko who suddenly appeared before its eyes. It could only take on the attacks.

At the same time the damage was generated by his claws, the surface of the Stare Viper’s face started to frost due to Hibineko’s skill, barehanded and water technique combination skill【Freezing Blow】. With its face being frozen, the Stare Viper’s movement suddenly became dull.

Just like a snake in the real world, a snake type monster has one common weakness on the thermal sensor organ called pit organ.

"*Shoom!*"

In the opening that was caused by Hibineko's attack, Shadow attacked repeatedly. As the Stare Viper received the backstab critical combo, its HP suddenly entered the red zone.

"I'll end it!"

Against the tottering Stare Viper, Holly unleashed her magic. A spear of soil grew from the ground, and skewered the Stare Viper.

Like Holly had declared, it became the final blow as the Stare Viper burst and scattered. When the gigantic body disappeared, the thing that the Stare Viper encircled was revealed.

"Marino-chan, it's safe. Come out and see this."

"Y-Yes!"

When Holly and Marino approached, Shadow and Hibineko turned over to give them way.

"It's some kind of egg. The Stare Viper was aiming at this."

"It seems so. But Hibineko-san and I couldn't get close.

"We're repelled by some kind of magic barrier." Shadow reported.

The egg was surrounded by a transparent membrane about 2 mels radius; even if Shadow and Hibineko touched it, they couldn't pass it through.

"I wonder if there's any conditions?"

"It's amazing, right? Ah, hey Pochitama!"

Next to Holly who was lost in thought, Pochitama escaped from Marino's arms. Marino thought he would hit against the magic barrier, but Pochitama slipped into the barrier without any resistance.

"Hmm, perhaps Mari-nyaa is the key this time?"

“Eh?”

Marino who was the subject of their talk, stopped moving in front of the barrier. Her face has the look of someone asking the question “What?”.

“For now, can you look at it, Marino-chan? If Pochitama can enter, Marino-chan probably could too.”

“Um, I understand.”

Urged by Holly, Marino timidly tried to touch the magic barrier. Then, similar to Pochitama, she passed through the magic barrier as if there was nothing there.

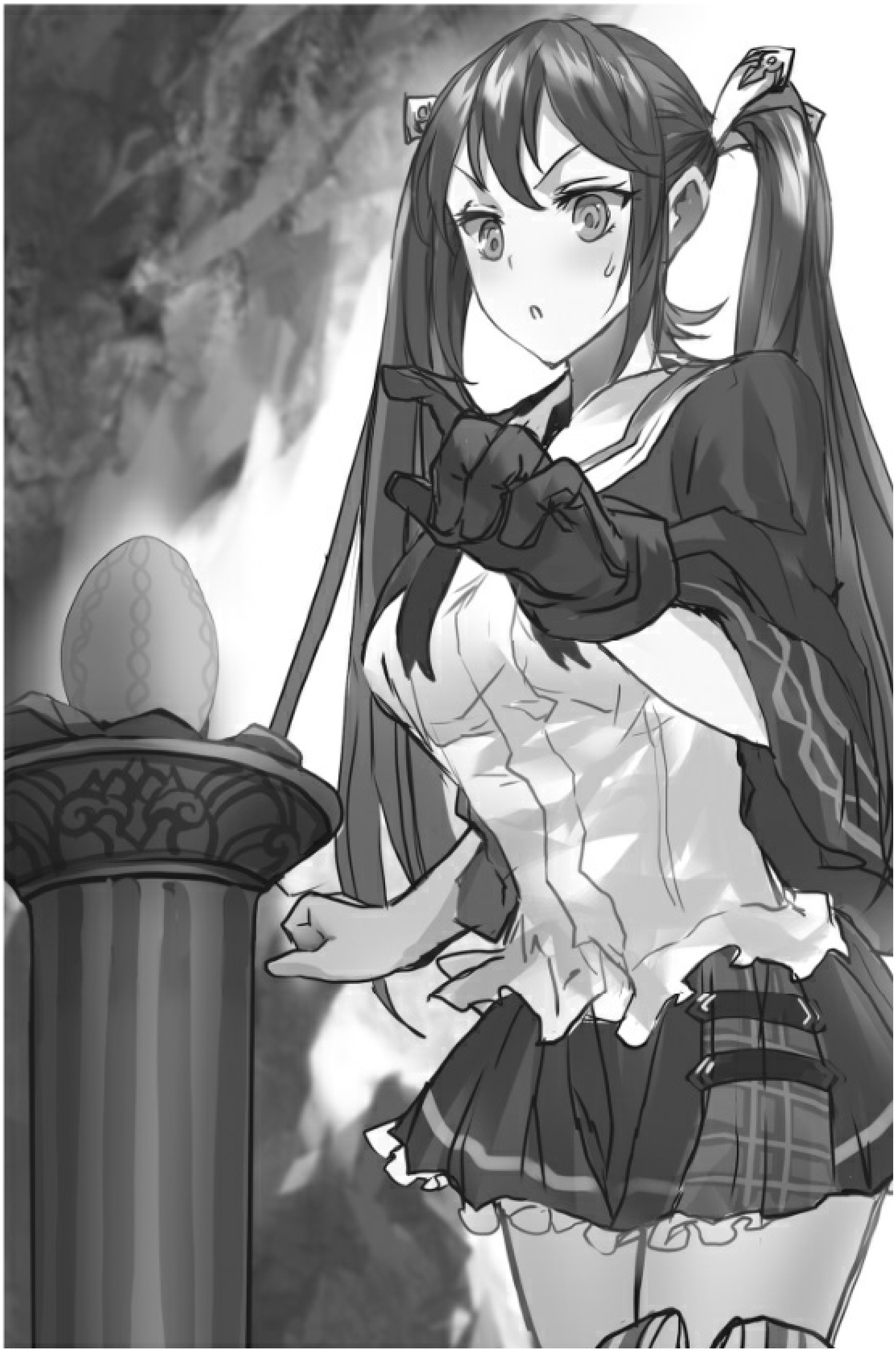
“Marino-chan, get the egg!”

“Eh, but that is…stealing…”

“It’s okay! It’s a quest item according to the appraisal.”

Marino couldn’t keep up with the momentum of Holly’s victory pose.

However, she also understood that the egg has no parents, so she touched the egg. And then, it transformed into an item card at Marino’s hand.



“Eh? the magic barrier disappeared?”

“Hibineko-san! Shadow-san! The Farlops ignoring my taunt are heading to you! Please be careful!”

When the magic barrier disappeared, the Farlops aiming at Shin turned toward Marino. While urging them to be on alert, the look on his face plainly expressed, “I won’t let you do as you please,” as he swooped down to attack the Farlops.

“Don’t even think about passing me!”

With Shin’s shout, light bullets flew in the air. Light bullets that were impossible even for the mage Holly to cast, were launched like a barrage of heavy rain.

Seeing the fired light bullets annihilate the Farlops, his allies' faces, Hibineko and the rest, twitched.

“Just like Holly-san said, it was true…”

When traces of the light bullets had disappeared, the creatures that were flying over the sky were gone.

“If it’s Shin, he can shoot everything down.” The words Holly had said became true, and Marino had experienced it first hand.

“It’s absurd as usual. It’s a good thing that wasn’t weakened by an ‘Update’.”

“That’s not true, Shadow-san. I went through the formal procedure to improve my stats, so that’s just an excuse.”

To Shadow who spoke in an astonished way, Shin protested while shrugging his shoulders. Because there were human players raising their stats seriously, if they were weakened badly, it would certainly incur displeasure.

As for good and bad, it exists in the race’s inherent abilities to some extent. But when raising the stats from the standpoint of the system, it was possible for anyone to become like Shin. It would be unreasonable if only the human players were weaker.

“Oops, leaving that aside. Hey Marino, what did you get?”

As if the annihilation several seconds ago, didn’t happen, Shin asked while looking at Marino’s hand. From Shin’s position, he couldn’t see what was there.

“Um, it’s this.”

“This is, an egg, huh? Then, is it the event where you collect items and make it hatch?”

“Right. I also have the same opinion. I heard that the monsters hatched from this type of event becomes your companion and often gives out items.”

Looking at the card on which an egg was drawn, Shin listed out the quest types he could think of. Not only Hibineko, but Shadow and Holly also nodded as they had a similar opinion.

“So far, I think there was a person who had fetched a monster partner, but I haven’t heard of anyone obtaining an egg like this.”

“It’s just a guess, but what if Marino's low level is the reason. If the boss is defeated by a person who is lower than the appropriate level for the dungeon, there are times when rare equipment is obtained.”

“Certainly. But then again, it may be a condition that unless your monster partner is a wolf or dog type, this quest is not possible or something like that.”

“This is a bad place to get excited, so let’s hold the inspection later. It’s time to decide what to do next.”

To Shin and Holly who started discussing the trigger condition of the quest, Shadow chided.

They could also proceed as is, but it was the egg that was obtained with much effort. Shadow said they should decide whether to move forward on this event or continue toward their original destination.

“Um, do such things happen a lot?”

“Though uncommon, it can’t be said that such a thing hasn’t happened. Such things like hidden quests, it’s difficult to re-challenge when you miss the timing. If it’s a situation like us this time, when there’s no important quest, it’s common to give priority to the hidden quest. What will you do? You could proceed as is, or you could also complete this quest.”

Shadow advised Marino who was having trouble deciding what to do. Shin and the others who listened didn't have any objections so they nodded and left it to Marino’s decision.

“Um, then, since it’s a special quest, can I go with that?”

“Okay, it’s decided!”

As for the undiscovered quest and restricted quest, they stimulated a gamer’s instinct. Even though Marino's goal was the scenic view, it seemed she have been attracted to this. But it was Shin who had the highest spirits even compared to Marino.

“What should we do first?”

“Have you not done such a quest before? It isn't that important to the say the least, but fumbling around is one way of also enjoying the game.”

“If it’s an animal type such as Pochitama, I would think of giving food or treating its wounds. But I can’t think of anything except warming the egg. But I shouldn’t be the only one to warm it though. This was found by our members with much effort, so I’d like everyone to cooperate.”

“That’s just like Marino. And then right away… It’s not just heating, we need to build the nest by wrapping items around the egg. As for the necessary items, you need to use the appraisal exclusive to tamers and summoners. Can’t you see it, Marino?”

Shin could use it too, but without enough skill level, he could not see the details of the necessary items.

“It’s no use. I can hardly see it.”

The level of special appraisal skill Marino had, was V. Shin was also similar to her, so now the members here didn’t know the necessary items.

“What would you do? If you want to continue, this will go on endlessly.”

“That’s right…Hey Marino, I’m thinking about cooperating with Cashmere, what do you think?”

What Shin suggested was the name of the summoner and tamer, Cashmere, a member of Rokuten guild.

“I think Cashmere-chan is reliable, but I heard she is doing another quest. Isn’t she busy…”

“It's not a problem, since I know her she won't mind if I ask. If I inform her about the quest specific for tamer like this one, I’m sure she will ask to go together persistently. Furthermore, she will not be satisfied with just clearing the quest. From this quest generation condition until the monster’s hatching, she will thoroughly examine it at the level that isn’t mentioned in Wiki. And surely Marino who first discovered it along with the rest of us will be involved. Fortunately, ‘I don’t take up other ones if I begin a quest’ is Cashmere’s motto. We just need her to appraise and quickly get out from here.”

“Um...Cashmere-chan, is that kind of person?”

Hearing things about Cashmere, Marino felt her impression of Cashmere was off the mark.

“You don’t know since you haven’t been affected yet, Marino.”

“That’s right. That is what is called pouring into the wrong passion.”

“You too Shadow-san?!...if that’s the case, then it can’t be helped.”

“Trust me on this!?”

“It’s quite different from the Cashmere I know. Besides, Shin sometimes exaggerates the story as a joke.”

“That’s also how I talk, but if it is about the High Humans, they’re exaggerated just about right.”

Shin said while having a distant expression.

There were many stats dependent skills in THE NEW GATE, so Shin and other Rokuten’s members unleashed skills that had power that were on another level compared to ordinary players. Because of that, even if he seemed to exaggerate his talk, there were some truth in it most of the time.

“Now now both of you, if you are done with your talk, let’s get moving. If we are going to go to where Cashmere-chan is, we will arrive quickly if we use the teleportation point in Tsuki no Hokora after we leave this dungeon.”

Because what Holly said was reasonable, the party left the dungeon and moved to where the teleportation point was set up in Alloride. And then from Tsuki no Hokora, they immediately teleported to Cashmere's place.

Moon Ground(Tsuki Teki Chi), was the second monster ranch that Cashmere managed. The other guild house with Cashmere in charge, 'Type 6 Sky Castle Palmirack', was the first ranch but because it was full with monsters, she had built a new one.

"I was waiting for you~ So? So? Where's the egg-chan that appeared in the hidden quest?!"

"You're too close and noisy. Calm down!"

As soon as they arrived at the ranch, a woman who was standing in front of the teleportation point approached Shin. With her semi-long silvery hair swaying, her purple eyes were sparkling.

Though Marino was surprised, Shin kept a distance from Cashmere without waver as it was a usual thing.

"Cashmere-chan is more high-spirited than usual."

"When it involves monsters, Cashmere is almost always like that. Cashmere, as you have been informed, we request appraisal."

Before they had teleported, Shin already told Cashmere they were heading to her ranch. He should have informed her that it was Marino who found the egg, but it seemed to have flown away from her consciousness.

"Ah is that so? Did Marino-san find it this time? Sorry for scaring you. Well~ When it comes to animal things, I tend to forget myself. Ah, I made everyone uneasy too. I'm Cashmere of Rokuten guild. Pleased to meet you all."

Cashmere regained herself due to Marino who had been surprised, and she introduced herself to Shadow and the others while laughing to cover the past.

Even though they were taken aback, Shadow and the others also introduce themselves.

Marino and Cashmere seemed to have interacted even in the real world, they were acquaintances before Shin was introduced to them.

How did things get this way? Shin didn't know either.

"Now that I think of it, you did say it would be nice to raise animals here since you love them so much."

"That's right. So, let me appraise the egg. You can count on me."

The hierarchical relationship seemed to have been decided among the two. Because Marino was older in the real world too, that had been adapted even in the game.

"Well then, hmmm…Shin-san, this is quite hard."

"What?"

Cashmere frowned and said as she had finished the appraisal.

"You will need Fumble seed, Behemoth's skin, and Phoenix's feather and some others rare materials. If it Shin-san, I think you have some stock in your inventory. But even with a powerful guild to collect these things, they would have a hard time. It's at this level of difficulty. I don't want to say it, but it would be almost impossible for Marino-san to gather them alone."

"Let me see. Uwaa, what is this?"

Seeing the list of items necessary for hatching that Cashmere listed, Shin and the other could not hide their surprise.

Though half of the items were available by extraction and subjugation, the weakest monster was at level 600 and the strongest at level 800. It was impossible for Marino to get her hands on it.

Even for a major guild, only by forming a party could they defeat an opponent at that level. In some cases, it was a level where instead of subjugating, the party was annihilated.

As for the way of extraction, some required skills were difficult to obtain in the movement system and only available in an unexplored region.

“This is…I have no choice but to say this is harsh to Mari-nyaa.”

“Without Shin-kun here, even we can’t do anything.”

Even Hibineko and Holly were helpless.

“Although the egg doesn’t look like a low-level player’s monster partner, the items required have such a high rarity. So, what will you do, Marino. Would you be willing to clear this quest? For now, if I lightly search inside my Item Box, I almost have them all.”

“How did they end up inside Shin’s Item Box…?”

This time, Marino was surprised at Shin who spoke like he could throw such expensive items around. His title as the top-class player was not just for show.

“It’s a given that he would have such items, and Shin-san would give them to his girlfriend without much consideration. I really admire that!”

“It’s not the reason I’m giving them to her!”

From Shin’s view, they weren’t such valuable articles either. Cashmere thought if this was for another stranger player, he would ask for a reasonable value, but since it was Marino, he would freely give it for clearing the quest.

“Either way, Shin-san is interested in what it will be when it hatches, right?”

“I can’t deny that, but I’ll not say it aloud.”

A conversation between the top-class players in THE NEW GATE, Marino and the others could only laugh.

They have unreserved exchanges, not only because they were fellow High Humans, but also because of mutual trust.

“Well, putting aside Cashmere’s story, I’ll take out the items in the list. Please check if something more is needed.”

Shin pulled himself together, and took out the items from his Item Box. Marino and Cashmere checked and found there were still two missing items.

“Ah, I have those things. I am also interested at what monster would come out, so I’ll take out the items.”

Saying so, Cashmere took out the missing items from her own Item Box.

“Even though I’ve not done anything, there are so many rare items”

“Rokuten’s Item Boxes are strange as ever.”

Beside the shocked Marino, Shadow retorted calmly.

A normal player would keep their belongings securely inside a warehouse, or put them up for sale, so no matter what happened, the items weren’t stored in the Item Box.

“Then, the materials are gathered, let’s begin at once.”

“Well. Though I somewhat feel like were doing something improper, that is just my imagination, right?”

It was a clearing method that was without much good feeling depending on the person, but if the said person didn’t mind it, there would be no problem in the system.

As recipient of the quest, Marino made a nest using the items. And then, she put the egg there. As the bar indicating wait time appeared above the egg and disappeared after several minutes, a chick was hatched from the egg.

With a light blue body, feathers extended from its forehead to its head and a person would think of the pattern as a red and green double helix. And the tip of the feathers were dyed a little black.

“Pii!”

“What is this,【Analyze】doesn’t work.”

"It really is. When it comes to this, until it matures, we will not know what kind of monster it is."

Almost all the monsters that has a larval body have the same appearances, their types were unknown until they reach adulthood. One such characteristic was that the name of the monster couldn't be seen with【Analyze】. Cashmere who knew about it, immediately presumed the reason.

"Then, I should nurture this child from now on."

Marino said as she placed the chick who energetically sang on her palm.

"That's right. I think the unused items can be used as a food."

Cashmere took the tip of the rice-plant from the remaining items and hand it to the young bird. Thereupon, the chick bit it without hesitating.

"Yeah, eat it well. For the items to become food, I wonder if it's a type that needs specific items to grow?"

As Cashmere had expected, when it finished eating several items, the chick's body shone, and grew one size larger.

"My my. I have not seen this kind of color tone of feathers before. What kind of form will it be? Damnit, I must clear another quest!"

"Shin, is Cashmere-chan okay?"

"She's always like that. Don't worry about her."

The high-spirited Cashmere was left alone, and Shin pushed Marino's back and started to move. As for the items that became food, they weren't enough to make the chick develop fully.

"I have time, and I know the place that drops these items, so let's go there immediately."

"Wa, it, a, mi, n, ute!"

"Uwaa! You're, scary…"

Was it on purpose? Or was it natural? With a low voice and standing at his back, Shin frowned at Cashmere who grabbed his shoulder.

"Give me the information later since I have cooperated with you~"

"I understand. Since Marino doesn't dislike giving information to Cashmere."

"Of course, I'll tell you the things I found out."

While smiling wryly at Cashmere's appearance, Marino nodded. Though they were friends, she also requested help from the High Human. Therefore, she didn't mind sharing information.

"Thank you very much!"

After parting with the excited Cashmere, Shin and the other moved to another area.

Several days later, in order to gather the items that became the young bird's food, Shin and the others assembled again. Marino and Holly fell madly in love with the chick's cuteness. Shin and Shadow were urged and rushed to some extent.

Hibineko had a wry smile while watching them as it became a normal routine.

Even so, the place they visited for the extraction was a high-level area where monsters, with an average level of 750, appeared. Apart from Shin, it was a dangerous place for Shadow and the rest.

"For the sake of Pyotama, let's work hard today too!"

"Yes, let's gather them!"

The chick that was called Pyotama, made a "Pii" sound as if to respond to the two people. Pochitama who sat on Marino's feet, looked a little lonely.

"As usual, the motivation of Mari-nyaa and Ho-nyaa is amazing. At this current age, has the number of women full of vitality increased?"

Toward the women's eyes that seemed fired up, Hibineko spoke in admiration. His tone was like an old man watching young people.

"Hibineko-san, I think that's wrong…"

While being cautious of their surroundings, Shin gave his opinion in a displeased voice. The women were certainly full of vitality, but Shin and Shadow couldn't deny the feeling of fruitless effort.

"For now, let's go as usual."

"Yes. Maybe if the bird grows up, the two will settle down too."

After they shrugged their shoulders, Shin and Shadow conveyed that they would first go to Marino and the rest.

Because it was troublesome if they met a monster, they moved stealthily to conceal their figure.

"Oh, found one."

While evading the fight against the monsters, Shin and Shadow searched for an item. Because they generally knew what kind of place they were in, there would be danger if they were not careful of the monsters.

If they had an encounter with many monsters, Shin would exterminate them while Hibineko and the others confined them. If there were few of them, Shin would attack alone and wipe them out.

"Pii!"

Pyotama grew a little again as it fed on the items. After growing more than 10 times, its figure was already past the stage of being called a young bird. And it was already bigger than Pochitama.

"I feel it could fly on its own. It gradually become more imposing."

But that was denied by Marino and Holly.

"Not yet, it's still cute!"

"That's right! There's a small possibility for it to grow more."

"No change of the objective or something like that, huh…?"

Shin didn’t understand Marino and Holly’s goal to some extent.

“If this is the type, I’m scared about what’s going to happen afterwards.”

“Is something wrong?”

“Well, in the breeding system, isn’t there a type of monster that will disappear and leave an item? As reward for ‘Thank you for raising me’ or a similar feeling to that.”

“I see, that is certainly going to be stormy.”

Shadow had a bitter smile as he heard Shin’s story. Taking into account these several days of Marino and Holly’s enthusiasm, he couldn’t help but to laugh.

It had a 50 percent probability, in fact, one shouldn’t be too optimistic.

“I think we have exhausted everything in this area, let’s return for the moment.”

Shin and the others teleported to Alloride from one of the teleportation points that were installed in various parts of the area, and then they teleported to Tsuki no Hokora.

Marino and Holly jumped out from the room with the teleportation point in order to feed Pyotama.

“Welcome home”

Shin’s support character, Schnee, who looked after his store, greeted Shin when he approached the counter. Though her movement and gesture were somewhat mechanical because she was NPC, her appearance was no different from a player.

Shin replied “I’m home” then he went outside. At the front yard of Tsuki no Hokora, Marino and Holly were already feeding items to Pyotama.

“We are feeding Pyotama well, but Pyotama still hasn’t finished growing, huh?”

"There are items we haven't given it yet. If it reached the point where Pyotama can eat that, isn't that the end?"

Hibineko, who was closeby, responded to Shin who was thinking out loud.

"There's not enough levels, it's probably that, right? Or perhaps, like in a manga, when such a story is told, something will happ——"

"It's glowing!"

"Shin! Come here for a moment!"

Just before Shin could end his sentence, Holly and Marino shouted. Pyotama, before the two, shone in golden color.

"Fumu, is this a flag?"

"Actually this is my first time seeing it happened in front of my eyes. Shin, is this really a flag being constructed?"

"Well, this is my first time seeing this development as well."

With Hibineko and Shadow talking in a serious tone, Shin answered what came to mind. Just like he had said, even Shin didn't have experience with this.

However, because he couldn't just stand there forever, Shin approached Pyotama. As for the light emitting from Pyotama, it was a little dazzling, but not to the extent where he couldn't open his eyes.

"I wonder if it already finished growing."

"Maybe. Are there any leftover items? Perhaps something will happen if you feed them to it."

By Shin's advice, Marino took out the final item. The item looked like a fruit of a red tree.

"Pyotama, come here and eat this."

"Kua!"

Pyotama without hesitation swallowed the item that Marino held out. Because the item had been ignored when feeding until now, Hibineko's guess seemed to be correct.

"Ku, Kua…KuaaaaAAAAAA!!"

Pyotama's cry echoed. At the same time, the light emitted from Pyotama strengthened, and it became so bright that Shin and the others couldn't open their eyes.

"…It seems to be over."

"Uwaa…"

When the light settled down and they opened their eyes, what came to their view was a huge monster that exceeded 4 mels.

"Beautiful…"

Standing alone, a single word leaked out from Marino's mouth.

Pyotama who grew up, has a dignified appearance that one would not expect from its former adorable appearance.

Both of its wings, emitting radiance that was not inferior to gold, silver or jewellery, expanded to wrap Marino and Holly. Its feet that firmly stepped on the ground had sharp talons. They revealed that this existence had definite power.

Shin felt the light of reasoning that dwelled in those eyes almost make him forget it was a program.

"KUU…"

The grown up Pyotama cried in low voice, and pressed it beak against Marino. That scene looked like a parent and a pampered child.

"No way, is this the Mystic…"

While looking at Pyotama and Marino making contact, Shin muttered as he was shocked.

The appearance that Pyotama matured into, was the highest peak of superior monsters in THE NEW GATE. The 'Mystic' was the apex of bird type monster.

Even a High Human would have a hard time fighting against the level 1000 monster.

But because【Analyze】couldn't be activated, Shin suspected that Pyotama probably was an event limited appearance. The Mystic that Shin knew was 2 times smaller than the imitation, this was also one of the reasons Shin came to this judgement.

If Tsuki no Hokora was not located at a hard to reach place where players hardly come, it would certainly become a big uproar.

"What the matter with Pyotama?"

Before Shin's eyes, Pyotama separated from Marino. Then it spread its wings.

After that, light emitted from Pyotama's body, and began to focus on one point. It stayed there for around 30 seconds. When the light disappeared, a sparkling colorful ore appeared there.

"Is that, don't tell me, 'Drop of Erathem'?"

That was an item essential for making《Ancient》grade equipment, Drop of Erathem.

Even for advanced level players, it was an item that was said to be difficult to obtain. And even for Shin, it was not something he could easily get.

"Ah…"

Marino's eyes stopped near Pyotama's chest. Seeing her face moving sideways a little, Shin guessed that she was reading some message.

The player who received the quest was Marino. In a quest like this time, the message that only a player like Marino could see may be displayed.

"Is that so…Even though we're getting along really well…"

"Marino-chan?"

"I think Pyotama has to go."

Hearing the conversation between Marino and Holly, Shin was convinced that this was the type of quest that the pet would leave behind an item and depart.

Marino was getting tearful, Holly revealed reluctance, as they were clinging to Pyotama.

Pyotama unfurled its wings again to wrap the two. Even if it was a program, Shin could feel the Pyotama was reluctant to part judging from its actions. After embracing each other for about ten seconds, Pyotama slowly separated from the two and flew away to the clear sky with a loud cry.

“Pyotama has gone”

“Uuu…Sh~in~Uu!”

“Guwaa! Are you really crying? Well I can understand that.”

Was it unbearable? Marino was clinging to Shin while crying. When Shin turned his gaze, Shadow was similarly embraced by Holly revealing his embarrassed face.

“As I get older, I’m worried that my tear glands become loose.”

Hibineko wiped his eyes with his paw. He appeared to weep in sympathy.

After waiting for the women to stop crying, Shin and the other entered Tsuki no Hokora.

“Have you calmed down?”

“…Yea”

Several minutes later, everyone was drinking tea in the living room of Tsuki no Hokora.

“So, what did Pyotama leave behind? If it’s a memento, I’d like to see it too.”

“Um, only this.”

In order to divert their attention from the parted Pyotama, Shin changed the topic to the item. What Marino took out was the ore that shone in rainbow color, the Drop of Erathem.

“Pyotama left a wonderful item. It’s an item that is used in production of《Ancient》grade gear, you know? Though advance skill is needed, which is a bottleneck.”

“Really? But in the item’s explanatory note, it is written that the player who has received this can use it without the necessary skill. Moreover, the equipment made using this item has no penalty even if the user stats are insufficient.”

“What is this…hidden quest’s item that is not incomplete? Nice job admin!”

While shrugging his shoulders, Shin spoke in amazement. At the same time, he felt sorry for Cashmere when he listened to Marino’s explanation. A quest like this, was basically limited to only once. Because when such an item was obtained many times, it would cause dissatisfaction from the players who raised their skill seriously.

Even for Shin, it took him considerable time to be able to use Drop of Erathem. And it would take years with Marino’s playing style. It was only this time that there was no restriction from the system.

“Marino-chan, with this you can power up in one go.”

“The performance of《Ancient》grade is not ordinary after all.”

Hearing Holly and Shadow speak, they were as pleased as if they received the reward. There was no jealousy towards their companion who had obtained a rare item.

“But it may be better for you to keep this from the public. If it were a sharp-eyed person, there is a possibility of this item being targeted.”

Hibineko worried about the adverse result after the equipment had been made. Like Hibineko said, because the equipment for《Ancient》grade has very high market value, it can also invite troublesome players.

“Since this is the precious item that Pyotama gave, I intend to use it well.”

Marino nodded at Hibineko’s words, and stared at the Drop of Erathem that had been converted into a card.

Several days later, Shin, who had been called by Marino, visited the cafe ‘Nyan da Land’.

“Hello Hibineko-san. I heard Marino is already here.”

“I have heard about it, and Mari-nyaa is in the private room at the back, in the second room.”

Heading in the direction Hibineko pointed, there were several private rooms in the back of the shop. As Hibineko said, Shin opened a door to a room where ‘2’ was drawn.

“Ah, Shin”

“Yo, have you finished the equipment?”

As for Shin being called, it was also to unveil the equipment that used Drop of Erathem which Marino had obtained.

When Marino took out the item card, a black muffler appeared on a table. There were few decorations, and the entire cloths contained red lighting lines.

“That’s pretty nice.”

The muffler was inferior to the item made by first-class craftsman, but as an 《Ancient》 grade item, its performance was superior.

“It’s nice, isn’t it? Because Shin’s equipment are mainly in black and red, I made sure that it would match as much as possible with that color scheme.”

“My equipment? Isn’t that a little out of place from Marino’s equipment?”

Shin was delighted to hear that it matched with his equipment, but he also felt it didn't match with Marino's equipment color scheme.

" I don't have to wear the equipment, so Shin, you wear it. Didn't you say you haven't decided on the equipment for your head? Like the manga I saw before, because the samurai had something that looked like a muffler, it was made from that design."

"Why do you want me to equip it?"

"Shin has been helping me a lot since I started this game, and you also lent me the needed items. Since I don't have anything I can give in return, I think this is fair. Besides, even if Shin wears the《Ancient》grade equipment, there's no sense of incongruity, don't you think?"

"Is this fine? Isn't this very valuable?"

Hearing Marino's story, Shin couldn't help but be surprised. To give away an《Ancient》grade equipment free of charge; even the retiring players couldn't do it easily in the game.

"I've talked with Holly-san and the others, and they all agreed. Will you accept it?"

"…Sigh, because you won't listen to anything once you start suggesting… Thank you, I'll accept it, Marino."

Shin knew Marino's character, and even though he felt embarrassed a little, he decided to accept it obediently. Urged by Marino who told him that she wanted to see when he equipped it, Shin put on the muffler.

"How was it?"

"Well, it's perfect. This is the right design after all."

As Marino laughed in satisfaction, Shin also laughed.

"And with this, I wonder if I'll be able to return the favor a little…"

The words softly muttered by Marino didn't reach Shin's ears.

◆◆◆◆

“Well, those feelings still remain now. Because I have upgraded a little since that, its performance has gone up.”

Inside the private room of the shop ‘Nyan da Land’ that was reborn in Balmel, in that room, Shin finished reminiscing.

Because the members at that time had gotten together, Hibineko and the others warmly talked about the previous story of Shin’s equipment ‘Dark King’s Muffler’.

In addition to the original players, Holly and Shadow, Schnee and Tiera also sat together.

“A handmade equipment, huh? Sure enough, receiving this kind of thing will make people happy?”

“I’m happy, you know? Wearing it or not is a different story.”

To Tiera’s question, Shin answered while laughing. Although it was not the best he could equip, Shin thought feelings were more important.

“Fumu, it was fun at that time.”

“Yeah.”

Hibineko and Shadow said as their eyes stared at the distance.

“Yes, I agree. By the way Shin-kun, have you received a present from someone since you came here?”

“Why do you suddenly ask? I have not received anything.”

To Holly who changed the topic abruptly, Shin denied while turning his eyes.

“If it the current Shin-kun, I thought there might be a lot of girls to give presents.”

“Even if the world has changed, I will not suddenly become popular.”

Shin said in a surprised tone. However, Holly’s eyes caught Shin from behind, glancing at Schnee’s figure.

“Shin-kun, you are more loved than what you think of yourself.”

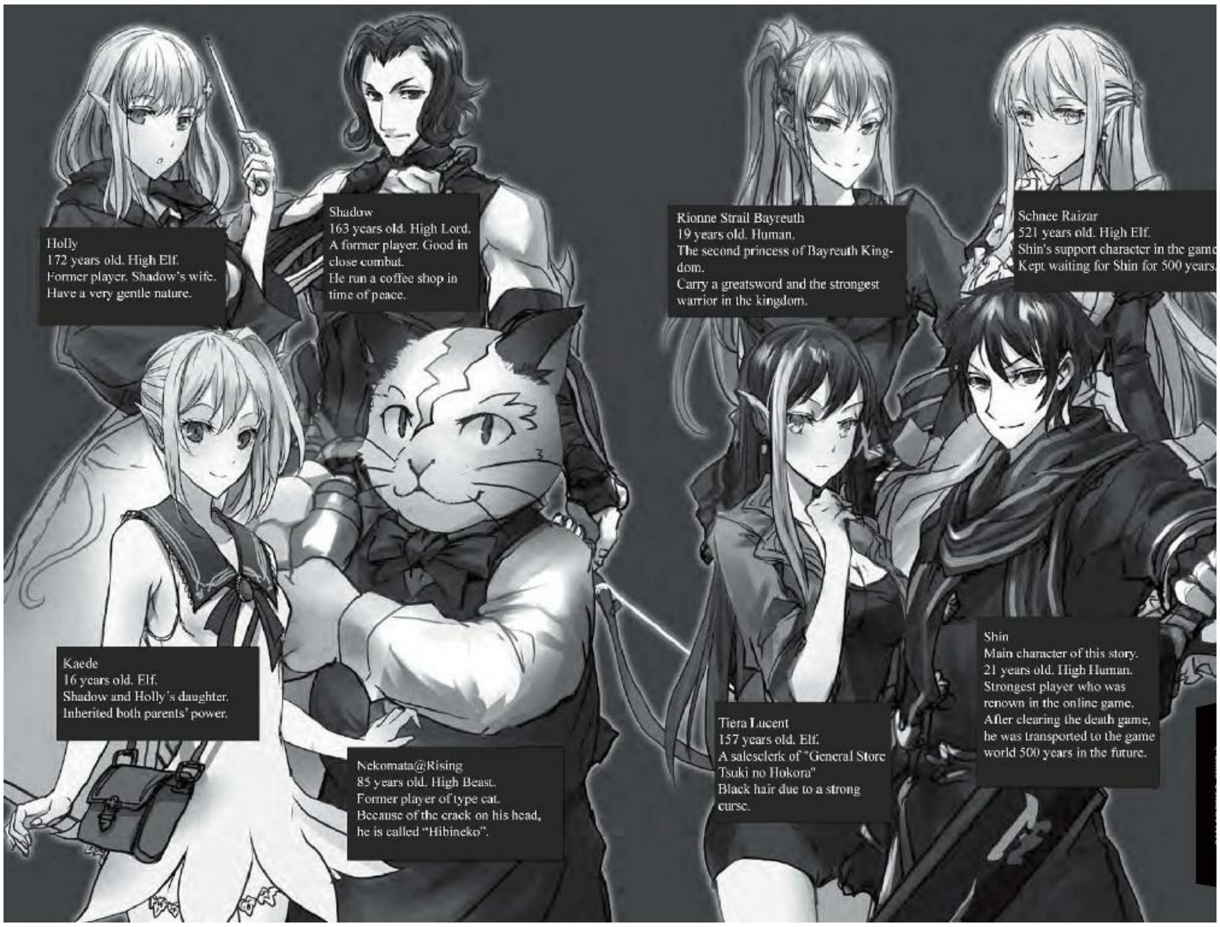
“Is that so…?”

At Holly’s meaningful words, Shin was full of doubt.

Fun times passed, and before long, Shin and his group returned to the inn.

Later, there was sighting of Schnee’s figure, who was selecting material items or something, with an earnest face.

Illustrations



Holly
172 years old. High Elf.
Former player. Shadow's wife.
Have a very gentle nature.

Shadow
163 years old. High Lord.
A former player. Good in close combat.
He run a coffee shop in time of peace.

Kaede
16 years old. Elf.
Shadow and Holly's daughter.
Inherited both parents' power.

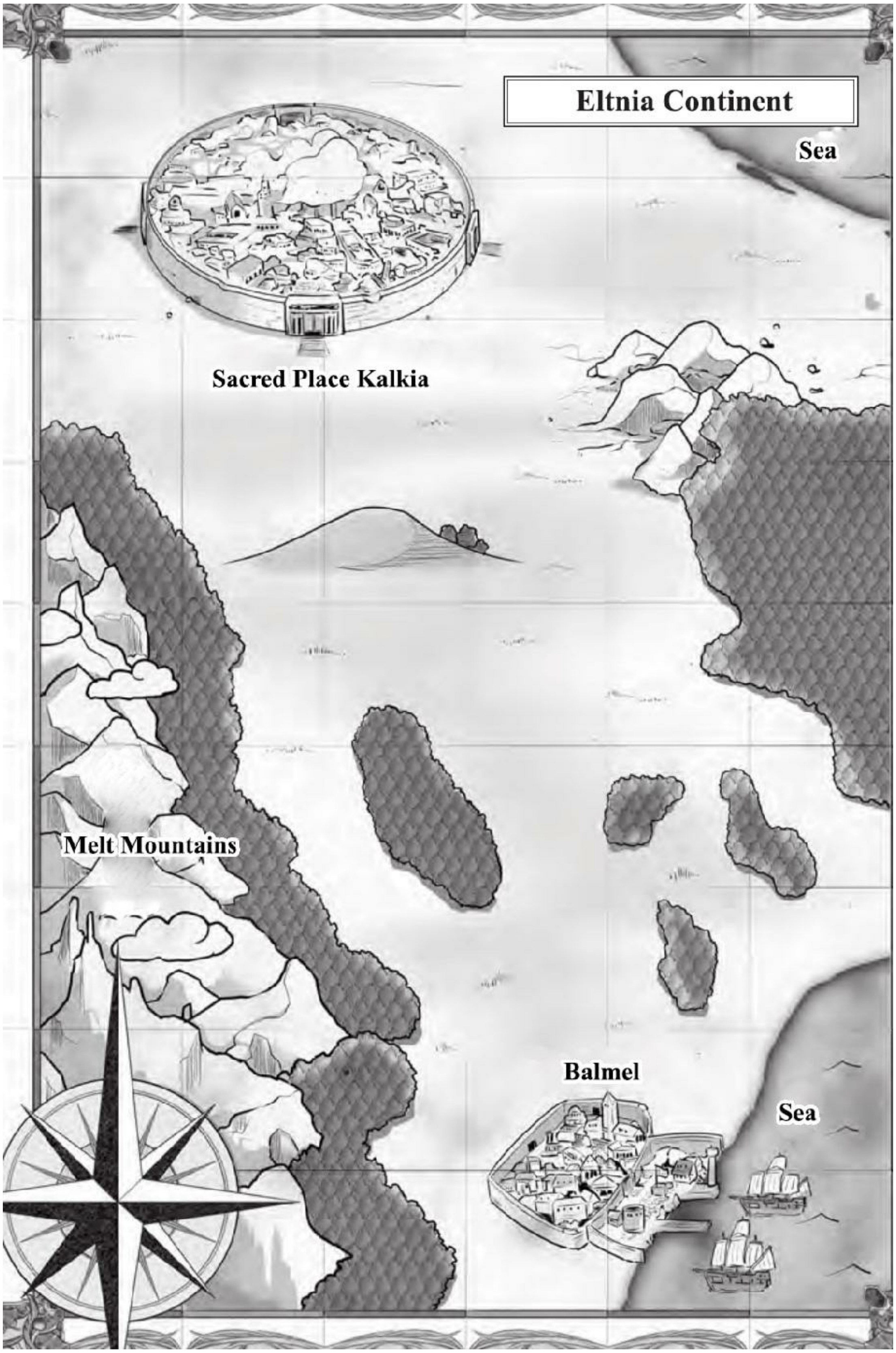
Nekomata@Rising
85 years old. High Beast.
Former player of type cat.
Because of the crack on his head, he is called "Hibineko".

Rionne Strail Bayreuth
19 years old. Human.
The second princess of Bayreuth Kingdom.
Carry a greatsword and the strongest warrior in the kingdom.

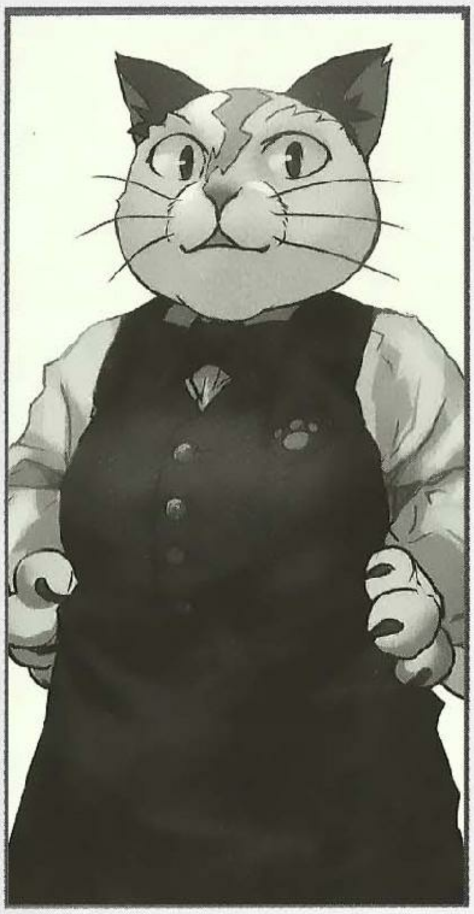
Schnee Raizar
521 years old. High Elf.
Shin's support character in the game
Kept waiting for Shin for 500 years.

Tiera Lucent
157 years old. Elf.
A salesclerk of "General Store Tsuki no Hokora"
Black hair due to a strong curse.

Shin
Main character of this story.
21 years old. High Human.
Strongest player who was renown in the online game.
After clearing the death game, he was transported to the game world 500 years in the future.



Eltnia Continent
Sea
Sacred Place Kalkia
Melt Mountains
Balmel
Sea



Name: **Nekomata@Rising**

Gender: **Male**

Race: **High Beast**

Main Job: Magic Fist Warrior
Sub Job: Beast Warrior
Adventurer's Rank: S
Affiliation Guild: Cat Type Tribe Word Ending Research Society(Form

● Stats

LV: 255
HP: 7433
MP: 3211
STR: 658
VIT: 387
DEX: 472
AGI: 599
INT: 336
LUC: 71

● Battle Equipment

Head: None
Torso: Cat of Wonder's Outfit(VIT Bonus[Medium], AGI Bonus[Medium])
Arm: None
Feet: Gentleman's Leather Shoes(AGI Bonus[Medium], Bind resistance[Medium])
Accessories: Bartender's Glass Wipe
Weapon: Misty Hound(Weapon destruction resistance[Medium], Attack speed increase, Barehanded skill damage increase-[Special], User restricted)

● Title(s)

- Non-Operation Expert
- Taijutsu Expert
- Magic Armor's Holder
- Proud Independent One
- Beast Element Holder

etc

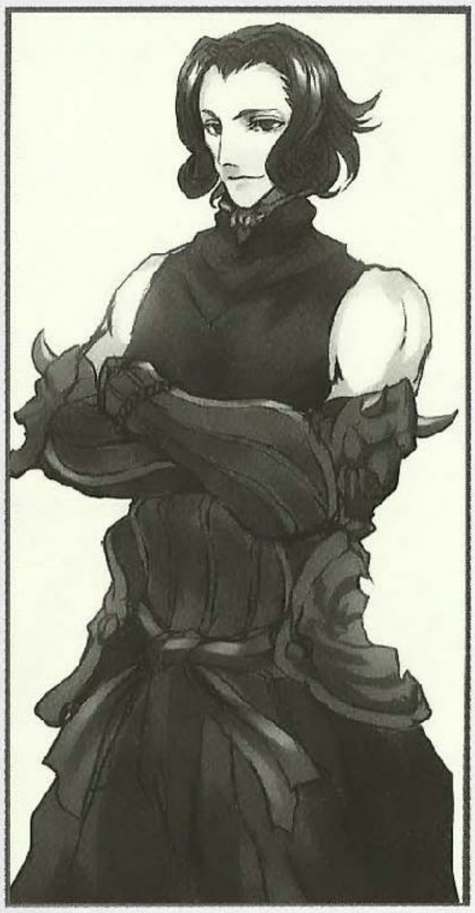
● Skill(s)

- Autobahn Kick
- Echo Blast
- Lion Growl
- High & Low
- Retsuhoushi

etc

Other

- Coffee Shop 'Nyan da Land' Manage
- Former Player



Name: Shadow Kurosawa

Gender: Male

Race: High Lord

Main Job: Shinobi

Sub Job: Magic Fist Warrior

Adventurer's Rank: S

Affiliation Guild: Majin Keppuuroku(Form

● Stats

LV: 255

HP: 6490

MP: 5311

STR: 568

VIT: 343

DEX: 601

AGI: 734

INT: 289

LUC: 41

● Battle Equipment

Head: Twilight's Headguard(Abnormal state resistance-[Medium])

Torso: Twilight's Ninja Costume(STR Bonus[Medium]. AGI Bonus[Medium])

Arm: Twilight's Arm Guard(Increase attack speed-[Medium])

Feet: Twilight's Tabis(Increase concealment effect-[Weak], Increase critical rate[Strong])

Accessories: Engagement Ring(Increase Luck[Special])

Weapon: Night Kill's Dagger(Penetration invalidity, Increase concealment effect[Special], Increase critical-rate[Special], User restricted)

● Title(s)

- Non-Operation Expert
- Taijutsu Expert
- Fencing Master
- Engagement Linker
- Head of a Household

etc

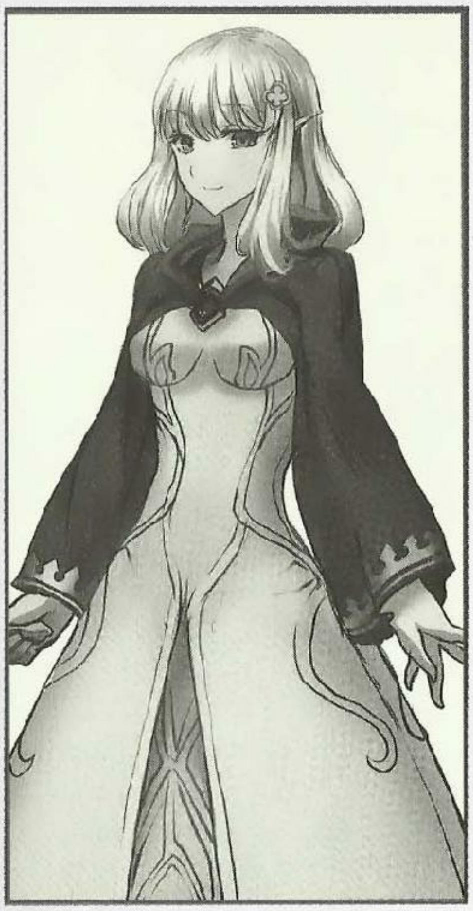
● Skill(s)

- Blade Stream
- Headhunting
- Hydro Sword
- Shadow Blade
- Mind's Eyes

etc

Other

- Coffee shop 'B&W' Manager
- Former player
- Former PKK(Player Killer's Killer)



Name:	**Holly Kurosawa**
Gender:	**Female**
Race:	**High Elf**

Main Job:	**Mage**
Sub Job:	**Alchemist**
Adventurer's Rank:	**A**
Affiliation Guild:	**None**

● Stats

LV:	**255**
HP:	**3490**
MP:	**7311**
STR:	**268**
VIT:	**243**
DEX:	**401**
AGI:	**334**
INT:	**749**
LUC:	**66**

● Battle Equipment

Head:	**None**
Torso:	**Soul Cloth's Robe**(INT Bonus[Strong], Instant death resistance[Strong])
Arm:	**Soul Cloth's Arm Guard**(INT Bonus [Medium], Harvesting Bonus[Medium])
Feet:	**Glittering Star's Boots**(INT Bonus[Medium], Abnormal state resistance[Medium])
Accessories:	**Engagement Ring**(Increase Luck[Special])
Weapon:	**Short Stick of the Dawn**(Magic damage increase-[Special], Decrease cooldown time[Special], User restriction)

● Title(s)

- Magic Expert
- Harvesting Expert
- Cooking Expert
- Blessing of the Soul
- Engagement Linker

etc

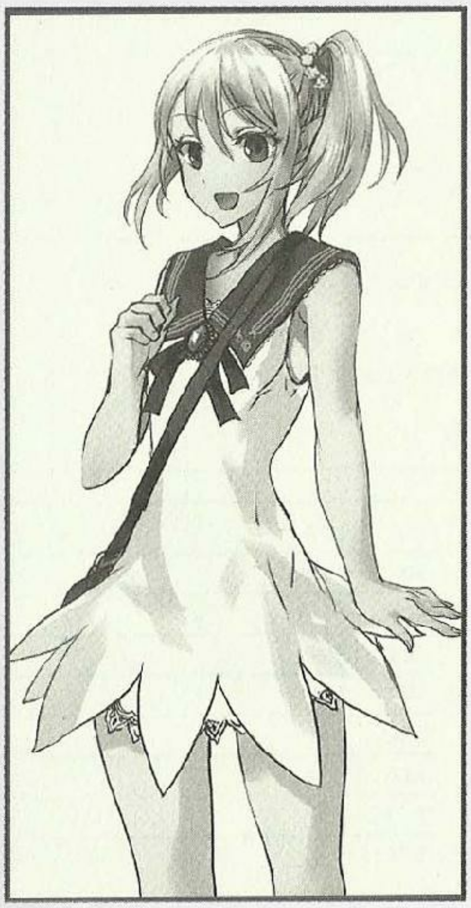
● Skill(s)

- Ray Stinger
- Meteor Fall
- Silent Whisper
- Echo Bomb
- Thunder Arrow

etc

Other

- Coffee shop 'B&W' vice-manager
- Pretty girl inside 'B&W'(?)
- Former player



Name:	**Kaede Kurosawa**
Gender:	**Female**
Race:	**Elf**

Main Job:	**Hunter**
Sub Job:	**Seamstress**
Adventurer's Rank:	**B**
Affiliation Guild:	**None**

● Stats

LV:	**255**
HP:	**4490**
MP:	**5311**
STR:	**468**
VIT:	**243**
DEX:	**501**
AGI:	**434**
INT:	**549**
LUC:	**88**

● Battle Equipment

Head:	**Soul Tree's Headguard**(Abnormal state resistance [Weak])
Torso:	**Dragon Hunter's Battle Dress** (DEX Bonus[Medium], VIT Bonus[Medium])
Arm:	**Soul Thread's Arm Guard**(DEX Bonus [Medium])
Feet:	**Dragon Skin's Boots**(VIT Bonus[Medium], Flame attribute resistance)
Accessories:	**Soul Tree's Protection Stone**(Instant death resistance[Medium])
Weapon:	**Soul Tree's Longbow**(Damage increase. Attack range increase. Weapon exclusive for Elf)

● Title(s)

- Non-Operation Assistant Instructor
- Taijutsu Assistant Instructor
- Archery Assistant Instructor
- Cooking Novice
- Blessing of the Soul

etc

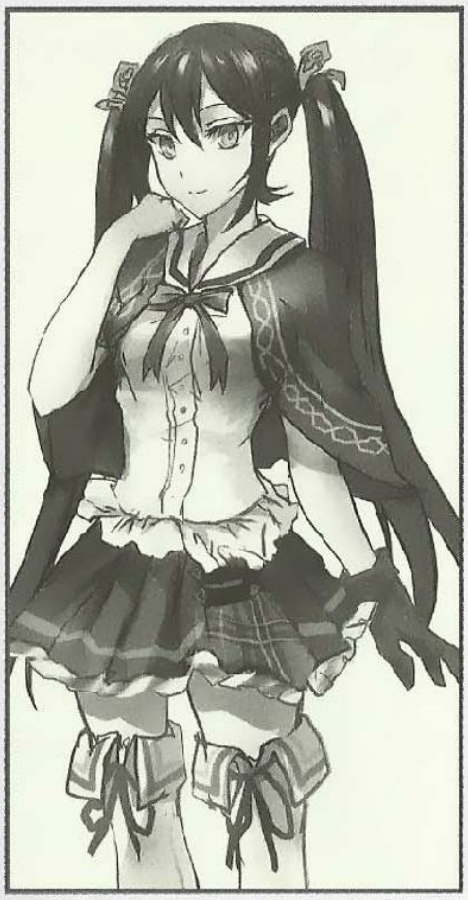
● Skill(s)

- Wind of Interference
- Gale Shot
- Ki Manipulatio
- Wide Arrow
- Hawk Shot

etc

Other

- A *Critical*
- Daughter of the coffee shop 'B&W'



Name: Marino
Gender: Female
Race: Human

Main Job:	Tamer
Sub Job:	Seamstress
Adventurer's Rank:	E
Affiliation Guild:	None

● Stats

LV: 147
HP: 2109
MP: 4111
STR: 209
VIT: 163
DEX: 301
AGI: 234
INT: 289
LUC: 52

●Battle Equipment

Head:	Blue Ribbon(Increase Luck[Weak])
Torso:	Intermediate Tamer's Battle Dress (VIT Bonus[Medium], Lesser magic charm increase[Weak])
Arm:	Intermediate Tamer's Gloves(DEX Bonus [Medium], Lesser magic attack increase[Weak])
Feet:	Intermediate Tamer's Boots(AGI Bonus[Medium], Lesser magic defence increase[Weak])
Accessories:	Engagement Ring(Increase Luck[Special])
Weapon:	Old Fox's Steel Whip(Hit Rate increase[Medium], Weapon distruption attack[Weak])

●Title(s)

- Art of Whip Novice
- Taijutsu Novice
- Sewing Novice
- Engagement Linker
- Lesser Magic Contractor

etc

● Skill(s)

- Analyze
- Ki Manipulatio
- Quick Step
- Whip Blow
- Contract Beast Summon

etc

Other

- Shin's Lover
- Mother of Divine Beast